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The Experience of Rural, Southern Appalachian, First-Generation College Students at a University: A Narrative Study

Ruth A. Darling
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Ruth A. Darling entitled "The Experience of Rural, Southern Appalachian, First-Generation College Students at a University: A Narrative Study." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Educational Administration.

E. Grady Bogue, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Jeffrey P. Aper, Marianne R. Woodside, Benita J. Howell

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
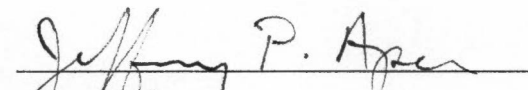
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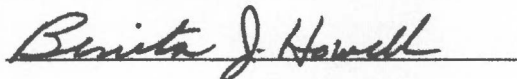
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Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

THE EXPERIENCE OF RURAL, SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN, FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY: A NARRATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Education

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Ruth A. Darling

August 1999

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this narrative study was to obtain and analyze stories of rural, first-generation students from Southern Appalachia in order to understand their collegiate experiences in light of the home culture they brought with them. Based on my university experience working with similar students and a review of relevant literature, I determined there was a need for research studies that: a) seek to understand the meaning, for these students, of the accounts they give of their lives and experiences as college students, b) seek to understand how these students make sense of their lives in the context of their home culture and the university and how their understandings influences their behavior, and c) provide data, which can assist faculty, administrators and staff in understanding these students' experiences. The primary research question that guided this study was: What is the experience of a rural, first-generation student from Southern Appalachia at this university?

The study was a phenomenological study in which I used narrative as both the method of inquiry and the object of interpretation. The participants were eight, first generation university students from rural, Southern Appalachia. Using an in-depth phenomenological interview format, each participant was interviewed at least twice and served as a co-collaborator in the research process.

After analyzing the individual student's stories, I created a portrait of each student based on the patterns and themes and the connections between them. The themes served to explicate the experience of the student in the university culture and their home culture and reflected the students' particular experiences as told in their stories. The analysis

then moved from common story elements or themes (analysis of narrative) to the meta-narrative (narrative analysis). The common themes represent the elements used to emplot (configure) a meta-narrative of experience that is shared by these students.

The themes and general findings of the study were: most of the students' decisions and actions were taken with or made with their allegiance to home and family values or relationships foremost in their minds; it was evident that the students came to the university looking for connections and expecting to find relationships with faculty, new friends and the environment; the students in this study learned best when actively engaged in their learning and when they were able to relate the learning to some aspect of their lives; it was evident that the influence of home and family, their need for connecting and relationships, and their hands-on learning style played a significant role in affecting how the students pulled away from certain majors and gravitated towards others; and key to a sense of identity is the ability of the student to tie together the elements of his/her story. The previous four themes contributed to or led to a sense of identity, though not in a linear way.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUAL CONTEXT

*You can't deny that students have experiences and you can't deny
that these experiences are relevant in the learning process even though
you might say that these experiences are limited, raw, unfruitful
or whatever. Students have memories, families, religions, feelings,
languages, and cultures that give them a distinctive voice. We can
critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But
we can't deny it. (Giroux, 1992, p. 17)*

*Maxwell (1998) defines the conceptual context as "the system
of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories
that supports and informs your research. Your conceptual
context is a formulation of what you think is going on with the
phenomena you are studying...it is constructed, not found" (p. 77).*

As students describe their experiences to me and as they tell me their stories, I
am taken with the powerful information I have been given about their lives and about
how they make meaning of their experiences relative to the world around them.
Listening to their stories and the descriptions of their experiences, I begin to understand
not only the relationships and connections among the events and choices of their lives but
also how they construct their world and their student identity.

As an administrator, I am particularly concerned about the stories I hear from
students who are from the surrounding, rural, Appalachian region and who are enrolled as
undergraduates at this large, research university. Students who are native to this
particular region may be thought of as "Appalachian" and are often identified by their
rural home culture, mountain dialect, socio-economic status and their strong ties to home
and family. These students bring to the university a unique set of socio-cultural traits that

may enhance and contribute to their undergraduate experience or may actually serve as barriers to their success.

Experiencing the transition from the home culture to the university culture is difficult for many students. A complicating factor in the transition is that these students are the first in their families to attend a college or university. The home experiences and culture the students bring to the university and the lenses through which they view their world may not provide them with the tools to make adequate interpretations of their experiences and to successfully navigate the university culture. The boundaries these students must learn to negotiate between home and university cultures, instructors and students often become barriers hard to penetrate. These obstacles make it difficult for students to connect with university learning experiences and to construct a student identity based on a coherent and meaningful set of experiences.

The concerns are generated by the experiences of and the stories told by the first-generation college students who are from the rural region surrounding the university. This particular region is commonly referred to as Appalachia and the people from the region defined as "Appalachian."

The Notion of Appalachia

Appalachia is a very complex region, which, over the past hundred years, has attracted the attention of local color writers, missionaries, natural resource and industry developers, various government agencies, scholars and community activists. Depending on a particular group's interest, their notion or concept of Appalachia and its population varied. The result is a region and people who have been largely defined by outsiders.

In the early 20th century, various writers, missionaries and educators defined Appalachian people as quaint but stalwart mountaineers who were ignorant and impoverished "hillbillies" with a distinct way of speaking. These negative stereotypes continued well after the mid-century mark. Weller (1965) described the mountain subculture as "regressive, existence oriented and traditionalistic." Ball (1968) summarized the principal components of the subculture as being fixation, regression, aggression and resignation.

The geography of Central Appalachia, in particular, has been a determining factor in the definition of the economic, social and cultural development of the region. The mountainous terrain coupled with inadequate transportation arteries caused an isolation that encouraged and nurtured a culture that stressed strong ties to the extended family, church, and individualism. The institutions in the community, the school, government and church have acted as vehicles to reaffirm these beliefs and customs. (Appalachian Educational Opportunity Center, 1996).

Economic exploitation of the region's natural resources, particularly timber and coal began late in the nineteenth century and led to the defining change from an agricultural region to a region dependent on industry. Beginning in 1880 and continuing through the decade of the 1920's, a major shift in the economy and livelihood of the people had occurred, a shift from a rural culture based on local agriculture to an industrial working class. These working class people depended on wage earnings in mining, logging, textiles and other forms of public work. With the onset of World War I and continuing through the Great Depression, the economy of this region declined resulting in a poor working class. A region whose people had depended on farming as their

livelihood had now lost most private ownership of their land and were dependent on the low wages of industrial employment (Eller, 1982; Gaventa, 1980; Shapiro, 1978).

As the industries continued to mine the natural resources of the region, the federal government became concerned at the rapid depletion of those resources. In 1911, federal legislation (the Weeks Act) was passed which established the National Forest Service. Over the next 20 years, land in the Southern Appalachian states was acquired by the federal government for the extensive national forest and national park systems. Along with the legislation came federal entities to manage the newly-acquired land and its resources such as the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corp (1933). In spite of the efforts by these agencies to improve regional economic and social conditions as well as monitoring the use of the region's natural resources, the economy of the region continued to decline through World War II and after.

In response to the depressed economic and social conditions that existed in the region, Congress passed the Appalachian Redevelopment Act that established the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The region was then defined by Congress in the Appalachian Redevelopment Act of 1965 as 398 counties in 13 states extending from southern New York to northeastern Mississippi. These federal agencies (ARC and those mentioned in the previous paragraph) were responsible for a variety of economic and social improvements within the region but at the same time have participated in the continued external domination of and defining of Appalachia (Eller, 1982; Whisnant, 1994).

Social scientists and scholars were also interested in Appalachia. Walls and Billings (1991) suggest that since the time "George Vincent of the University of Chicago took a four-day horseback ride" through several eastern Kentucky counties and characterized them as "a retarded frontier" (p. 49), Appalachian scholars have been attempting to characterize and define the subculture of the region. Using "historic and political criteria, as well as physical" John C. Campbell (in Raitz & Ulack, 1991) referred to the southern Appalachian region as "the Southern Highlands and included 254 counties in the Blue Ridge, the Allegheny-Cumberland Plateaus, and the Greater Appalachian Valley of 9 states" (p. 16). The boundary that divided the northern Appalachian region from the Southern Highlands was the Mason and Dixon line. Bruce Ergood (1991) suggests that "Campbell knew all to well that mere geography does not a region make…His concern for the living conditions and the health of the people, and his detailed description of the schools and education among them gives further indication that he was describing the people and their society in a particular geographic region" (p. 40).

Efforts of social scientists to explain the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment in the region have resulted in several theoretical models such as the culture of poverty model, the internal colonialism model and the internal periphery model (Caudill, 1963; Gaventa, 1980; Moore, 1994; Weller, 1965). While some scholars have argued for an Appalachian culture based on ethnicity (Keefe, et al., 1987), most current scholars agree that the socio-economic conditions that have emerged in central Appalachia are in part a product of the modernization of American life and are not necessarily "ethnic" or unique to this particular region but are typical of rural areas. According to Plaut (1983), the traditional, rural culture is based on a "relatively small

human group bound in kinship and tradition to a rather well defined piece of geographic territory" (p. 268).

Batteau (1991) asserts that many of the descriptions of the culture discussed in these paragraphs reflect "the observer's own background, values, and categories, projected onto the screen of a strange and unfamiliar Appalachia" -- one that portrayed Appalachia as middle class readers wanted it to be portrayed. Unfortunately, the "myths" and negative stereotypes from such portrayals have continued over the years to influence the perception of what many think of as Appalachian culture today (p.154).

Batteau (1991) suggests that the contemporary culture of Appalachia is the product of an interaction between local values and external confrontations and "lacks a clear set of group boundaries and a consistent and unique culture" (p. 166). His approach is to define Appalachia historically rather than structurally or as a social group. He argues that throughout the history of struggle and confrontations in the Appalachian region there is a part of Appalachia that has endured and is based on those social relationships that form the mountain community. These relationships "provide the most important meaning in life for those who were born, raised and still reside in rural Appalachia" (p. 167). They are relationships based on religion, family group/kin and a strong sense of place/identity anchored in a shared sense of regional history.

Education in Appalachia

Throughout its history, the Appalachian people have been involved in struggles involving both external factors (outside domination of capital, absentee land ownership, a middle class interpretation of the culture) and internal factors (social relationships which

emphasize religion, family/kin and a strong adherence to place which forms self identity). When considering educational attainment of the native Appalachian, another struggle emerges between the external factors of family, socio-economic status, ruralness and the internal/school factors of perceived minority group status and discrimination, teachers' attitudes and institutional discrimination (Keefe, et al., 1983).

In my review of the social science and educational literature, I found there are relatively few studies which explore these internal and external issues that influence schooling and educational attainment of children and youth in the Appalachian region. However, the studies that do exist raise several common themes, many of which focus on the influence of family and kin. Rural Appalachia is often described as a kin-based society in which the family provides the foundation for self-identity and perceptions about the way in which the world outside is organized (Keefe, et al., 1991).

Several authors describe the family as a "web" of relationships that can be nurturing as well as inhibiting (Bennett, 1986; Borman, 1988; Borman and Mueninghoff, 1985; Keefe, 1991). In these studies, the family served as support, provided role models and a sense of personal identity and motivated the students. At the same time, the family sent mixed messages about the importance of schooling and future educational attainment. Most disturbing is the fact that in these studies the school reflects the socio-economic and class structure of the community. The families who are poor, rural or urban, and native to the Appalachian region find themselves in the lower class status, with devastating results relative to the educational success of the students. (Borman and Mueninghoff, 1985; Cavender, 1981; Keefe, et al., 1991).

In the limited literature that addresses the college and university experience of Appalachian students, I found the same complicated issues present, with the additional issue of negotiating or renegotiating a self-identity. In her ethnographic study of the ways which Appalachian students constructed their identities in the university setting, Cole (1995) found that the students brought to the university a strong sense of family, neighborliness and personal identity. In order to gain acceptance in the dominant group, the students often acquiesced to the dominant group norms, renegotiating their identities in ways that were in opposition to their Appalachian identities.

The web of family influence played a somewhat different role in a study concerning women and college attendance. Eagen's (1993) qualitative study sought to "understand the influences of role models and cultural and family role expectations on Appalachian women's decision to pursue, and their experiences in, higher education" (p. 267). Significant role models for these women included people from their families who "exemplified determinism and individualism, especially women who carried the burden of caretakers in often difficult circumstances" (p. 273). These women tended to evaluate themselves relative to their efforts and abilities to maintain relationships "within a tapestry of interconnectedness" (p. 275).

Focusing on actual learning experiences, Spatig (1994) studied six successful native Appalachian college students who were in their final months of a teacher education program. These students were from poor, rural families with the expressed traditional Appalachian values; and even though they had successfully negotiated high school and college, they were leaving the program with the same ideas about teaching as when they entered the program. They returned to their homes as teachers, content to be

employed close to home but apparently unaware of the difference they could make in the lives of their students.

First-Generation College Students

The students in the previously-discussed studies focusing on higher education were all first-generation college students. Recent literature defines a first-generation college student as the first person in a family (parents and siblings) to pursue post secondary education. (Levine and Assoc., 1989; Terenzini, et.al., 1996; York-Anderson and Bowman, 1991). Speer (1993) states

> that many Appalachians who consider higher education are first-generation college students. Conversely, many of the students who come from outside the region are second- and even third-generation college students. This produces a real difference in the amount of knowledge about the infrastructure of higher education and how to gain access to it. Knowing whom to call about what issues, and at what junctures, is a kind of cultural knowledge learned mostly from acquaintance with the system of higher education (p. 21).

Research on first-generation students consistently "indicates that first-generation students are at greater risk with respect to both persistence and degree attainment than are their traditional peers, largely because of the lower levels of academic and social integration" (Terenzini, et al., 1996, p. 3).

Terenzini et al., in their 1994 qualitative study of non-traditional students and their transition to college, suggest that further research is needed about the subtle and complex ways first-generation students negotiate separation from their home culture and families. They recommend that further research should probe how first-generation students "maintain or reject their personal cultural integrity and succeed or fail in college as a result of this process" (p. 64).

Rural, Appalachian, First-Generation University Students: A Cultural Perspective

It is apparent that college students who are from rural areas in Appalachia and who are first-generation students may be in jeopardy in terms of their successful transition from home to college and in terms of their persistence to graduation. The influence of family, religion and sense of identity with place as well as previous educational experiences can serve to help the students negotiate the new university culture. However, such influences can require them to renegotiate their identities in ways that are in opposition to their Appalachian cultural heritage. The path to a college degree can become too difficult for the students to navigate, resulting in early leave taking or academic failure. It appears that struggles like these continue to present barriers which require a dynamic and adaptive response from the students (Pottinger, 1989).

Considering the notion that these students are negotiating multiple cultures, it is helpful to consider the perspective of educational anthropologists. The literature that addresses cultural anthropology and education supports the notion that cultural perspectives should be used when studying educational experience and institutions. George Spindler (1963) suggested that anthropology helps shed light on human behavior in educational institutions just as it has on behavior in factories, hospitals, peasant communities and various tribal societies. In institutions of higher education, cultural perspectives can be used to describe, understand and appreciate college and university life. More specifically, to understand why students think and behave they way they do, it is critical to first describe and appreciate their culture (Dean, 1986; Giroux, 1992; Terenzini, et al., 1994; Van Maanen, 1979).

Stories may be one way we can understand student experience. Relative to understanding experience and culture through the study of stories, anthropologists Turner and Bruner (1986) suggested that stories are "culturally constructed expressions (which) are among the most universal means of organizing and articulating experience" (p. 15). Bruner (1989) proposed that life narratives reflect the notions and prevailing theories about possible lives that are a part of one's culture. We can characterize a culture by the narrative models it provides for describing the course of a life. By listening to and analyzing students' stories, it is possible then to gain insight as to how these students organize and articulate their experiences as they negotiate and re-negotiate the connections between their home and family culture and the university culture.

In his research summary concerning first-generation students and their families, London (1989) offers the following caution:

> As educators we do these latter students no great favor should they become-out of our own unawareness – confused, frightened, and alienated, only to drift away and drop out. If we – faculty, administrators, and support staff – mean for them to stay and not become attrition statistics, we need a keener understanding of the sensibilities and concerns they bring with them and of the difficulties they encounter along the way (p. 168).

Statement of the Problem

University students who are from rural areas in Appalachia and who are first-generation college students may be at risk in terms of their successful transition from home to the university and in their persistence to graduation. There is a need for research studies that:

a.   seek to understand the meaning, for these students, of the events, situations and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts they give of their lives and experiences as college students,

b.   seek to understand how the students make sense of their lives in the context of their home culture and the university and how their understandings influence their behavior, and

c.   provide data that can assist faculty, administrators and staff in understanding these students' experiences and in improving the university culture for rural, first-generation students from Appalachia.

Purpose of the Study

Polkinghorne (1989) asserts that practitioners use narrative explanations to understand why people behave the way they do and suggests that research strategies should focus on the narratives people use to understand their worlds (pp. x-xi). Using narrative theory and inquiry, I sought to understand how rural, first-generation students from Appalachia came to know the university and themselves as college students. The purpose of this narrative study was to obtain and analyze first hand accounts (stories) of rural, first-generation university students from Appalachia in order to understand their collegiate experiences in light of the home culture they brought with them. Based on the students' points of view, a meta-narrative (story) of the students' shared experiences and common story themes will be presented which will provide insight into the students' experiences for faculty and administrators.

Research Question

      The primary research question that guides this study is: What is the experience of a rural, first-generation student from Appalachia at this specific university? More specifically, I will seek to understand (a) the students' accounts of their experiences, (b) what those experiences mean to them and (c) how their university experience connects with their home culture.

Significance of Study

      I have found few studies that examine the experiences or the "sensibilities, concerns and difficulties" of rural, Appalachian, first-generation students' experiences during college. There is a need for more research studies that address the cultural boundaries and barriers found in higher education relative to this particular student population. In an effort to understand, it makes sense to consider the stories students share with me.

      McLaren (1993) states that it is "the retelling of stories" that gives students their voice (p. 228). As a practitioner, my role and responsibility is to help students find their voice and to help them make the necessary connections among their desires, their frustrations, and the cultural forms and social practices that inform them. It is my belief that through a close examination and analysis of the students' stories, I will come to understand the students' experiences and then, by considering the students' point of view, I will gain a clearer understanding of their experience within the university culture. The understanding gained from this inquiry will provide concerned administrators and faculty

information about the students' perceptions of and experiences within the university culture and will offer possibilities for meaningful and constructive change.

Methods and Procedures

Because I seek to describe human experience, this is a phenomenological study in which I use narrative as both the method of inquiry and the object of interpretation. Also influencing this study is my point of view as a qualitative researcher and those theories that provide the lens through which I view the study: constructivism and critical theory.

For purposes of this proposal, I use narrative as both the research approach (method of inquiry) and the phenomenon to be studied (object of interpretation). The study will emphasize narrative, as first told in the students' stories and then as interpreted in the texts of the interviews. Finally, based on the analysis of the students' stories and the resulting themes, I will present a meta-narrative that will represent the shared story of the students' experience within the university culture.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made about this study:

- Some students who are from rural Appalachia and who are first-generation college attendees are at risk in terms of their persistence to graduation.

- It is necessary to explore the individual student's experience and how he/she interprets that experience in order to understand how the student makes meaning of his/her university experience.

- The student's understanding and experience of the home culture and the university culture may both hinder and enhance his/her success at the university.

- Narrative inquiry and phenomenological interviews are appropriate methods to use when obtaining first hand accounts (stories) of students' experiences.

- Students were willing to share with me their stories of their experiences of being a student at the university and were truthful in their accounts.

Limitations and Delimitations

The findings of this study are specific and are not generalizaible. They represent a specific group of students in a specific context and focus on the students' unique experiences in that context.

Specific delimitations included:

- Students were from rural or rural-fringe areas within the Southern Appalachian region.

- Students were first-generation college attendees.

- Students completed 45 or more credit hours and were in good standing at the university.

- Students fell within the traditional age range of this specific university population.

- Six female students and two male students agreed to participate in the study and were available for interviews Summer, 1998.

- Students were not married.

Terms and Definitions

- **Southern Appalachia**: Four western counties of Maryland; the Blue Ridge, and Allegheny Ridge counties of Virginia; all of West Virginia; eastern Tennessee; eastern Kentucky; western North Carolina; the four northwestern counties of South Carolina; northern Georgia; and northeastern Alabama (Campbell, 1991, p. 32).

- **Selected main feeder states for the university student applicant pool**: Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, Virginia.

- **Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area**: A county with a city of greater than 50,000 inhabitants (Source: 1990 Census of Population, Appendix A; Lapping, et al., 1989).

- **Nonmetropolitan**: The territory, population, and housing units located outside metropolitan areas (Source: 1990 Census of Population, Appendix A).

- **Rural**: Defined as "places less than 2,500" and "not in places." The "not in places" category comprises "rural" outside incorporated and census designated places and the rural portions of extended cities. Rural population and housing units are subdivided into "rural farm" and "rural nonfarm." "Rural farm" comprises all rural households and housing units on farms (places from which $1,000 or more of agricultural products were sold); "rural nonfarm" comprises the remaining rural. "The urban and rural classification cuts across the other hierarchies; for example, there is generally both urban and rural territory within both metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas" (Source: 1990 Census of Population, Appendix A, p. A-11).

- **Rural-urban fringe**: Defined as rural non-farm people who tend to commute to jobs in the urban centers or suburbs (Lapping, et al., 1989, p. 6).

- **First-generation college or university student**: the first in an immediate family (including parents and siblings) to attend a college or university (Levine and Assoc., 1989, Terenzini, et al., 1996, York-Anderson and Bowman, 1991).

- **Traditional age of students attending this specific university:** 18-25 years old. Source: Fact Book, 1997-1998

Organization of the Study

The study is presented in six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the conceptual context for the study, presents the problem and states the purpose and significance of the study, reviews the theoretical approach, methods and procedures used, and identifies the assumptions, limitations and delimitations and terms and definitions.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature regarding Appalachian culture, education in Appalachia, Appalachian college and university students, university culture and first-generation college or university students and college student development theories. An interdisciplinary perspective is introduced on culture and education through literature presented from the field of educational anthropology. Following this is a discussion, which points to the gaps in the literature pertaining to college student persistence and success.

Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework and methodology that guided the study. Critical, constructivist and narrative theory are discussed in terms of how these

theories framed the phenomenological interviews, analysis of narrative and narrative analysis.

Chapter 4 presents an analysis of the student narratives as re-storied in individual student portraits. The themes from each narrative are listed.

Chapter 5 continues with the analysis of the narratives using a relational matrix and accompanying text to represent and discuss the common themes that emerged across the students' stories. A meta-narrative representing the shared experiences and themes of the university students is presented along with a display of the emplotted meta-narrative.

Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the findings relative to the literature and presents a discussion of the Implications for Policy and Practice. Recommendations for Further Research are presented.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

*A story must have a setting. Setting a believable setting
(or set of settings, as there are often more than one) is a critical
part of the storying art It involves filling in needed details concerning
color and weather and space: describing correctly the
quality of light, the look of buildings and objects, the lay of the land; and
simulating 'just so' the requisite ambience – a hint here,
an illusion there, neither too much nor too little.
(Kenyon and Randall, 1997, p. 96)*

The quote from Kenyon and Randall's (1997) book, Restorying Our Lives, serves

as a metaphor for how I approached this review of pertinent literature. Keeping in mind

the idea of narrative or story, I considered this review as providing a "believable" setting

for my research story and as describing the "lay of the land."

Creswell (1994) suggests that in qualitative research "the literature should be used

in a manner consistent with the methodological assumptions; namely, it should be used

inductively so that it does not direct the questions asked by the researcher" (p. 21). There

is support in the literature concerning qualitative studies for literature reviews to appear

at the end of a study to be integrated with the findings of the data analysis (Creswell,

1994; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Holloway, 1997; Patton, 1990). The same authors also

suggest that a review of the literature could be included in the Introduction or as a stand-

alone chapter. All agree that the process of reviewing the literature is most often an on-

going process beginning with the qualitative research proposal, continuing through the

data analysis and ending as the conclusion is written by the researcher.

I have found the literature helpful as I formulated the research question as it provided a context for my research and identified gaps in the current knowledge. As I analyzed the data and the particular themes in the students' stories emerged, I found it necessary to return to the literature. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest "it seems most productive to regard a review of the literature in interactive terms. You can learn different things from the work of others depending on what you have learned and on what you need to know" (p. 18).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the setting or the "lay of the land" for the research question, "What is the experience of a rural, first-generation student from Southern Appalachia at a particular university?" The review of the literature represents my initial inquiry, which focused on framing the research proposal and then the subsequent ongoing heuristic efforts of analyzing and interpreting the data and learning "what I needed to know."

First, I consider the general landscape and cultures involved in the study - Southern Appalachia and the Research University. Then I review the literature that directly relates to the "characters" in my research story, the college students. Theories about college student learning and development are presented as well as literature that describes the changing college student population. The next section presents a discussion that focuses on the "complications" relative to the rural, first-generation students from Southern Appalachia and their university experience. An interdisciplinary perspective is introduced through the literature reviewed from the field of educational anthropology. This literature addresses issues involved in connecting with or negotiating multiple cultures relative to schooling. Finally, a discussion is presented which points out the lack

of knowledge and understanding of this particular student population's experience at a university and how my study might contribute to the gaps in current literature relative to student success.

Home Culture: Southern Appalachia

The students in this study claim as their homes east Tennessee and northwestern North Carolina. These states fall into the area defined by John Campbell (1991) as the Southern Highlands. Campbell describes the region as "a land of mountains, valleys, and plateaus. Each of the three parallel belts which lying lengthwise northeast to southwest, form the Highlands, is characterized by the predominance of one of the physical features just indicated" (p. 33). Because the students in this study are from this region, as are their parents, grandparents and extended families, I found it important to understand the history and context of this particular region in order to understand their stories of experience and how they construct meaning relative to those stories.

Although several of the students referred to themselves as "country," "redneck," or "backward," only one student spoke of herself as being "Appalachian." I would suggest that the lack of "Appalachian identity" relative to this particular group supports the broader notion that the people of this region have been defined by those outside of the region. In a chapter written by the Peoples Appalachian Research Collective (1991), the authors suggest that "most definitions (of Appalachia) do share a common characteristic in that they are externally imposed by social scientist 'observers' of the region or by policymakers and program developers whose job it has become to 'administer' the region" (p. 5). According to Raitz and Ulack (1991), "The mere mention of the word

Appalachia conjures up a variety of impressions depending upon one's perspective or purpose: Appalachia has been variously described as a region of mountains, coal mining, poverty, unique culture, tourism, welfarism, isolation, and subsistence agriculture" (p. 10).

Appalachian scholars (Batteau, 1991; Eller,1982; Pudup, Billings and Waller, 1995; Shapiro,1978; Whisnant,1994) have traced current perceptions and definitions of the region back to the 1870's when local color writers were seeking "hidden corners" of America where cultural norms were different from the mainstream. As they traveled throughout the region, these authors wrote fiction and non-fiction referring to a "strange land inhabited by peculiar people" (Shapiro, 1978, p. xiv). Because the inhabitants of the southern mountains were viewed as "peculiar" they were also seen as "needy" and attracted the attention of northern Christian missionaries whose goal for these "unchurched" people was to educate them in Christian and American values and in the ways of modern life.

Since these pictures and stories portrayed a life far from the mainstream American modern way, the region was perceived as "a discrete region in but not of America" (Shapiro, 1978). The people were labeled as quaint but stalwart mountaineers who were ignorant and impoverished "hillbillies" with a distinct way of speaking. These negative stereotypes persisted throughout the twentieth century. Authors described the mountain culture as "regressive, existence oriented and traditionalistic" as well as a subculture with the principal components of fixation, regression, aggression and resignation (Ball, 1968, Weller, 1965).

Late in the nineteenth century, the interests in the southern mountains expanded from literary intrigue and benevolence to economic exploitation of the region's natural resources, particularly timber and coal. Eller (1982) describes the years from 1880 to 1930 as the "years of transition and change." By 1910, large amounts of mountain land were in the hands of absentee owners and outside corporations. New roads, railroads, mill villages and mining towns were built to support the rapidly-expanding industries. The result was that by 1930 a major shift in the economy and livelihood of the people had occurred, a shift from a rural culture based on local agriculture and self-sufficient farming to a new industrial working class. These working class people depended on wage earnings in mining, logging, textiles and other forms of public work. From these economic changes a new political system emerged which was based on a hierarchy of those who controlled the jobs controlled the political system and those who controlled the political system used that power to exploit the region's natural wealth (Eller, 1982; Gaventa, 1980; Shapiro, 1978). Local interests were subordinate to the interests of the outside corporations or absentee owners and rigid class distinctions developed between the employer and the employee. People who had depended on farming as their livelihood had now lost most private ownership of their land and were dependent on the low wages of industrial employment. The gap between the haves and have-nots grew, and poverty within the working class became prevalent throughout the region.

As the industries continued to mine the natural resources of the region, there was concern by some for the rapid depletion of the southern forests and timber supplies, resulting in an advocacy for better conservation practices. Between 1911 and 1933, federal legislation was passed which cleared the way for the establishment of national

forests and parks. The National Forest Service purchased large tracks of land in Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia, resulting in the continued loss of the region's private citizen land ownership (Eller, 1982; Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere. 1996. Report 4 of 5)

Along with federal legislation came federal entities to manage the newly-acquired land and its resources. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Civilian Conservation Corp were established in the 1930's to serve as agents in regional development and planning efforts. These agencies are responsible for improvements within the region economically and socially but at the same time have participated in the continued external domination of and defining of Appalachia (Eller, 1982; Southern Appalachian Man and the Biosphere. 1996. Report 4 of 5; Whisnant, 1994).

In response to the depressed economic and social conditions that existed in the region during the 1950's and 1960's, Congress passed the Appalachian Redevelopment Act that established the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). The goal of the ARC was to provide a cooperative federal-state framework for planning coordinated social and economic development for the region. Due to the mechanization of the coal industry, the decrease in logging and timber industry and the sharp decline in farm employment, the region and its people were experiencing an alarming unemployment rate, extremely high levels of poverty and an infrastructure critically lacking in social support serves such as schools, social services and health services. This was brought to the attention of the national consciousness through John F. Kennedy's presidential campaign which focused on the poverty in the region and by Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" efforts. The

media focus on the rural, mountain region brought another wave of outside interest intent on fixing what was wrong in Appalachia. Social services and volunteer organizations such as VISTA brought to Appalachia volunteers interested in organizing local communities and developing the infrastructure of schools, health care and other social services (Whisnant, 1994).

Thus far, I have reviewed how Appalachia was perceived by the local color writers, the missionaries, the outside corporations and absentee owners and governmental agencies. Also interested in the Appalachia were the social scientists and scholars of Appalachia.

In the field of social science research, the persistence of poverty and underdevelopment in Appalachia has been a consistent theme. Efforts of social scientists to explain these phenomena have resulted in several theoretical models. The subculture of poverty model, best illustrated in Jack Weller's (1965) book Yesterday's People, identifies the internal deficiencies of the lower class subculture as the cause of the problems. Unfortunately, the stereotype of the "the mountaineer" as being backwards, ignorant and fatalistic emerged from this model and places the blame for poverty and underdevelopment on the victims.

The internal colonialism model explains the region's underdevelopment in terms of economic exploitation and compares Appalachia to colonized nations that are dominated by outside interests. Harry Caudill (1963) in his work, Night Comes to the Cumberlands, portrays Appalachian culture as a traditional, peasant-like subculture that emphasizes kinship, noncompetitiveness and egalitarianism and which is being politically and economically exploited by outside interests and industries. John Gaventa (1995)

asserts, "The development of Appalachia and the South is related to the 'colonial' nature of the region. Absentee and concentrated ownership of the land and natural resources means that wealth has been drained away from the region and its people" (p.6). With the decline of land-based industries (coal, timber, textiles), the rural people are left in a double bind – "with access neither to the land nor the jobs historically associated with it" (p. 7).

The internal colonialism model explains the problems of underdevelopment by focusing on external cultural factors such as domination and exploitation by outside capitalistic forces. The culture of poverty model focuses on internal cultural factors such as the characteristics ascribed to the mountaineer man and the resulting fatalistic world view (Cavender, 1981). Among several current scholars, these models are viewed as lacking adequate explanations. They ignore the diversity present in the population, the presence of social stratification in rural areas, and the broader socio-historical and political perspectives. (Batteau, 1991; Cavender, 1981; Keefe, 1991; Moore, 1994; Walls, 1976)

Walls (1976) argues that the internal periphery model is more appropriate than internal colonialism: "As the core-periphery distinction is presently used by several schools of economic thought, it seems reasonable to apply the term peripheral to such regions within advanced capitalist countries as Appalachia which share many of the characteristics of underdevelopment, poverty and dependency found in the peripheral countries of the Third World" (p. 242). Moore (1994) views the spatial economic organization as composed of two elements, a leading urbanized core area and a lagging rural periphery. Core regions evolved as urban or metropolitan economies with high

potential for growth. Peripheral regions experienced lagging growth or stagnation and relied over time on growth chiefly driven by core area demands for resources. Moore suggests that the Appalachian periphery is divided into two peripheries: an exterior periphery more accessible to urban core areas outside of the region and an interior periphery more removed from core areas (p. 319). Northern and Southern Appalachia are considered as exterior periphery and Central Appalachia represents the interior periphery, the more rural and economically-depressed area. Moore points to the "ARC's Central Appalachian subregion, or interior periphery, as being most removed from the national economy, relying on declining industries such as agriculture, coal mining, forestry and low-wage manufacturing" (p. 320).

An economic ethnographer, Halperin (1990), agrees that this particular economic model is not unique to Appalachia but exists in many rural parts of the world. "Appalachians as rural working class people are similar to other rural populations not only across the United States, but globally. They are undergoing processes of rural to urban migration and rapid economic changes" (p.5). Common themes in her ethnography that described the rural population and experience include: a) maintenance of family ties, b) a movement to "shallow rural" - a middle ground between country and city where multiple livelihood strategies were employed, c) family, land and community served as the economic unit and held psychological significance and d) wage labor was predominant (p. 3-5).

Current scholars agree that the socio-economic conditions that have emerged in central Appalachia are in part a product of the modernization of American life and are not necessarily unique to this particular region but rather are typical of rural areas (Batteau,

1991; Eller, 1982; Halperin, 1990; Plaut, 1983; Pudop, Bollings and Waller, 1995). In

their introduction to the collection of essays titled <u>Appalachia in the Making: The</u>

<u>Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century</u>, Pudop, Bollings and Waller (1995) suggest

that the effort of scholars should be focused on "mapping the points of similarity to and

difference from the settlement and transformation experiences in other rural locales

across the nation" (p. 9).

According to Plaut (1983), there are basically two sociocultural systems at work

in rural areas. The first is a "traditional" system based on a "relatively small human

group bound in kinship and tradition to a rather well defined piece of geographic

territory" (p. 268). The second or "modern world" system consists of the "large,

complex, specialized and hierarchical forms of social organization found in urbanized

industrial areas" (p. 268). He suggests that "there comes a point in this process of change

where individuals realize that their interests and opportunities in life are no longer

determined by community and kin but by their position in the transcommunity agency

that employs them" (p. 269). This visible transition from an allegiance with kin and the

local community to large organizations is most apparent in rural areas like central

Appalachia.

Lapping, et al., (1989), suggest that rural areas can be identified according to

geographic location, the dominant economic activity or social characteristics. The U.S.

Bureau of the Census (1990) defines "rural" in two ways: (1) a nonurbanized area of less

than 2,500 people (low population density); or (2) a county without a city of greater than

50,000 inhabitants, known as a "nonmetropolitan county. Lapping, et al. (1989) assert

that "population density alone may be a misleading criterion for determining rural and

urban places. Rural pockets may be found within a 'Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area' (SMSA), defined as a county with a city of greater than 50,000 inhabitants" (p. 5). These particular authors present a typology of rural areas with the purpose of showing the diversity of economic and social features that make up rural America and state that "most importantly, a single national policy on rural American is not likely to speak to the differing needs of the many kinds of rural areas (p. 15).

The Appalachian scholar Batteau (1991) suggests that the contemporary culture of Appalachia is the product of an interaction between local values and external confrontations and "lacks a clear set of group boundaries and a consistent and unique culture" (p. 166). Batteau's approach is to define Appalachia historically rather than structurally or as a social group. He argues that throughout the history of struggle and confrontations in the Appalachian region there is a face of Appalachia that has endured and is based on those social relationships which form the rural, mountain community. These relationships "provide the most important meaning in life for those who were born, raised, and still reside in rural Appalachia" (p. 167). Such relationships are those based on family and kin, a strong sense of place, religion and an identity anchored in a shared sense of regional history.

As I listened to the student's stories, I became more convinced of the need to learn more of the history and culture of their region in order to understand how the students constructed meaning of their experiences. Plaut (1983) asserts that "a cultural system organizes the social and physical world of its members into an understandable matrix of objects and ideas which suggest acceptable responses and value orientation" (p. 268). In order to understand it was necessary for me to gain insight into the social and

physical worlds of the students, their particular local places and the associated cultural traditions often described as Southern Appalachian.

University Culture: The Students' Educational Setting

Just as I sensed the importance of understanding the regional and home culture of these students, I also realized the need to return to the literature that addresses university culture in general and to familiarize myself with the general descriptive data pertaining to the specific university. The students in this study attend an East Tennessee, public research, "level 1" university, defined as follows by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1997):

> These institutions offer a full range of baccalaureate programs, are committed to graduate education through the doctorate degree, and give high priority to research. They receive annually at least $33.5 million in federal support and award at least 50 Ph.D. degrees each year.

Based on data presented in the University Fact Book, 1997-98, the total student headcount enrollment in the University was 25,039, of which 19,061 were undergraduates. The University offers 110 undergraduate degrees and 146 graduate and professional degrees from 15 different colleges, programs and professional schools. The faculty numbers 1,203. General characteristics of the student body include the following:

- 80% of the students are full-time (12 or more credit hours)

- 10% are minority students

- 51% are female, 49% are male

- Average ACT Composite Score for first time freshmen: 23.6

- Average High School GPA for first time freshmen: 3.26

- 80% of the students are from Tennessee

- 3% of the students are International

- 7,450 undergraduates live in on-campus residence halls

The main campus and agricultural campus comprise 420 acres and there are a total of 219 structures on campus.

A good deal of literature concerning cultures in higher education addresses a general university culture, faculty and student cultures and their subcultures (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Newton, 1992; Van Maanen, 1987, Terenzini, et al., 1994). University culture reflects interactions among history, traditions, organizational structures, and the behavior of students, faculty and staff. Culture can be observed through certain artifacts, such as the university's mission statement, academic programs, language, stories, symbols, rituals and ceremonies. Culture is also revealed in the espoused and enacted values and the core beliefs shared by leaders, faculty, students and other constituents such as alumni and parents. (Kuh & Whitt, 1988) Culture is created by the participants in a university and therefore creates meaning for them (Tierney, 1992). Culture determines how the participants go about their daily work, the language they use, how they make decisions, who is involved and how they set priorities.

Faculty culture is influenced by several cultural forces (Tierney & Rhodes, 1993). The national culture, the culture of the profession, the disciplinary culture, the institutional culture and individual cultural differences all contribute to how faculty create meaning in their roles as professors at the university. The culture of the discipline is the primary source of faculty identity (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). It includes assumptions about what is worth knowing and how knowledge is created, about standards for effective

performance and about professional/discipline-oriented activities such as publications, research and other creative endeavors.

Student culture, as described by Van Maanen (1987), consists of the taken-for-granted patterns of eating, sleeping, socializing; the study habits, which activities are status-enhancing or status-degrading and the norms of behavior inside and outside the classroom. He suggests that student cultures offer their members the "thick and thin guidelines for how to get an education, and thus define for students just what an education means" (1987, p.3).

There is concern expressed in the literature that student cultures are becoming increasingly isolated from the university and faculty cultures (Astin & Chang, 1995; Dalton, 1989; Kuh, 1988; Van Maanen, 1987). The values and assumptions shared by the students appear to be in conflict with the university's educational objectives. Moffat (1991), in his ethnographic study of undergraduate students at Rutgers University, found a student culture which was profoundly influenced by the American popular culture and not so much by the culture of academe. Holland and Eisenhart (1990), in research presented in Educated in Romance: Women, Achievement, and College Culture, found a culture of romance on campus which was over-powering for most women and placed them in a culture where their attractiveness to men was what counted most. Academics actually received little attention.

Another factor adding to the perceived gap between student and faculty cultures is the apparent conflict within a university culture that supports research versus a culture which supports undergraduate learning and student development (Astin & Chang, 1995). Astin and Chang ask the question, "Is there some necessary or inevitable conflict between

these two important institutional functions?" (p. 45). In their survey of 212 baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities, they discovered that "it appears that it is virtually impossible to place a very strong emphasis on research and at the same time to maintain an even modest emphasis on students. Thus, to maintain even a modestly strong emphasis on both undergraduate teaching and research, an institution apparently must compromise more on research than on teaching" (p. 46). For faculty to meet the expectation of research in their disciplines, it appears from this study that the distance increases between professors and students.

Another theme that emerges from the literature on university cultures concerns the students who are different from the mainstream population of a university culture. The literature that deals with multiculturalism and diversity points to the need to examine university cultures and their barriers relative to students who are not traditional. Kuh & Whitt (1988) suggest that culture-driven policies and practices may denigrate the integrity and worth of certain groups. Tierney (1991) asserts that "in academe we have created organizational borders that distinguish some activities and not others, that make particular individuals prominent and others invisible" (p. 9). Focusing on the actual student learning experience, Dean (1986), in his article on multi-cultural classrooms, writes that teachers need to structure learning experiences that both help students write their way into the university culture and help teachers learn their way into student cultures (p. 23).

Considering the functional components of the university, Newton (1992) describes the university as having two cultures ; "A university or college is necessarily both a corporation, or organized, business-like body or guild, and a very personal,

sometimes contentious community of teaches and learners" (p. 8). The "corporate"

culture views the university as a business enterprise whose purpose is to deliver

education to clients at a price they can afford. This culture has a very diversified work

force: accounting and finance, personnel, institutional research, various student support

services, construction and maintenance, alumni relations, fund raising, public relations,

job placement and legal counsel. This is only a partial listing of the many areas

considered necessary to support the other culture of the university (teaching and learning)

and yet the staff involved with these areas have little if anything directly to do with

teaching and learning. "Unruly students and outspoken faculty" are mentioned as

problems for the "smooth running of the institution" (p. 8). The community of scholars

believe that "teaching, research and learning are the central and real business of the

campus; all other campus business is operational support for the academic mission" (p.

10). The challenge is "to help both cultures recognize that they are inextricably entwined

and that neither can exist without the other. The corporate culture exists for the scholarly

community; the scholarly culture exists only with the support of the corporate

culture"(Newton, 1992, p. 12).

Cultures within the university are created by, and create meaning for, the various

and diverse participants. Tierney (1993) suggests that an education should "concern the

ability of people to come to terms with their own and others' identities, and to understand

how the world shapes and is shaped by social interaction" within various cultural systems

(p. 322). By examining the literature on university culture, I am more aware of the

various influences and players inherent in a university culture and how they perhaps

inform, shape and influence the stories told by the university student participants in this study.

College Students: The Research Participants

This research study focuses on the experiences of eight first-generation students from Southern Appalachia at a specific research university. As noted in the Introduction, I am interested in the students' accounts of their experiences and what those experiences mean to them. Although this is a study emphasizing the individual experiences of the students, I find it helpful to acknowledge the place of these individuals within the broader context of how scholars are describing the college student population currently attending colleges and universities. It is also helpful to consider those theories concerning student learning and development that underlie student development programs and teaching/learning initiatives on college and university campuses.

Scholars concerned with the demographics of college students support the notion that college students are different from those just a few decades ago (Astin, 1993; Hansen, 1998; Keeton & James, 1992; Levine and Cureton, 1998; London, 1989; Terenzini, et al., 1994; Tierney, 1992). "Overall student demographics, preparedness, and attitudes toward college have shifted greatly over the last three decades, coupled with an increase in the number of college students" (Hansen, 1998, p.3). Two recent articles by Hansen (1998) and Levine & Cureton (1998) use scholarly research and government reports as resources to describe the current college and university student population and note the changes in today's society that have "altered the rules for academic learning

forever" (Hansen, 1998, p.3). The following is summary of the demographic changes and issues presented in the articles by Hanson and Levine & Cureton:

- Fewer than one in six of all undergraduates fit the traditional stereotype of the American college student attending full time, being 18-22 years of age and living on campus.

- By 1995, 44 % of all college students were over 25 years old.

- By 1995, 54% of all college students were working.

- By 1995 56 % were female.

- The percentage of high school graduates age 16-24 enrolled in college rose from 46.6% in 1973 to 65% in 1996.

- Enrollment of minorities in higher education rose from 15.7% in 1976 to 25.3% in 1995. Increases came mostly from Asian and Hispanic students.

Hanson notes that "despite low levels of preparedness, students tend to be highly confident in their abilities" and tend to view education "as another commodity to be purchased" (p. 4). He attributes changes in students' attitudes and behaviors to several major societal and cultural shifts: less time spent with families, lower incomes, single-parent households, increase in violence and drug use and the overwhelming consumption of mass media by young people. On a cautionary note, he suggests that data show the difference is cultural (as noted in the previous statement) more than academic.

Due to the changing demographics of the students, Levine & Cureton (1998) assert that college is not as central to the lives of undergraduates as it has been in the past. "Increasingly, college is just one of a multiplicity of activities in which they are engaged every day. For many, it is not even the most important of these activities; work and

family often overshadow it" (p. 14). Because of their more complicated lives, students hold more of a consumer attitude toward higher education – they focus on convenience, quality, service and cost. For many, life is "work, school and home" (p. 14).

Similar to Hanson, Levine & Cureton found students less prepared academically for college. He reports that nearly one third of all undergraduates surveyed had taken a remedial course in reading, writing or math – up from 29% in 1976. Another "academic hurdle" for students is the "growing gap between how students learn best and how faculty teach" (p. 17). Levine & Cureton refer to research conducted by Schroeder (1993) in which over three fourths of the faculty surveyed prefer the "global to the particular; are stimulated by the realm of concepts, ideas, and abstractions; and assume that students, like themselves, need a high degree of autonomy in their work" (p. 17). More than half of the students surveyed performed "best in situations characterized by direct, concrete experience, moderate-to-high degrees of structure and a linear approach to learning. They value the practical and the immediate and their focus is primarily on the physical world" (p. 17). Levine and Cureton point out, it is no wonder that "faculty believe students are less well prepared, while students increasingly think their classes are incomprehensible" (p. 17). As a result of this widening gap between students and faculty, Student Affairs divisions have often taken the lead in developing programs geared to support the learning in classrooms.

College student development theories have informed and shaped many of the co-curricular activities and academic support programs on college and university campuses. Previous to 1960, college student learning and development theories were based primarily on the idea of *in loco parentis,* in which colleges believed they had a

responsibility to act on behalf of parents for the good of their students (Upcraft, 1995). With the unprecedented growth in higher education, student activism and a changing student population, the sixties marked a turning point in the way scholars, faculty and administrators theorized and studied student learning and development. Kuh (1995) suggests that research on college student learning and personal development follows two strategies: developmental and college impact. Both strategies attempt to account for what happens to students during college, but they differ in their focus.

> Influenced by psychological theory, developmental approaches attempt to illuminate the dimensions and structure of growth in college students and to explain the dynamics by which that growth occurs. The college impact model focuses less on the internal psychological processes associated with dimensions of change and more on the external environmental and sociological conditions and origins of change (p. 126).

For purposes of this review, I decided to follow Kuh's lead and review relevant theories that fall into these two categories.

Kuh (1995) defines the developmental theories as emphasizing " the qualitative differences between discrete periods or stages that are presumed to unfold in a linear, sequential and orderly fashion" (p. 126). A number of theories fall under this strategy, but those most relevant to this study are theories developed by Chickering and Riesser (1993), Baxter-Magolda (1992) and Perry (1970).

Perry (1970) developed a theory of intellectual and ethical development which encompassed nine stages of development, moving from a simplistic, categorical view of the world to a more relativistic, committed view. First year students start out with a dualistic conceptual framework (right-wrong, good-bad) and grow to an understanding of the "contingent nature of knowledge, values, and truth" (Upcraft, 1995, p. 16). As they move through the stages, they integrate their knowledge with their identities, gain a better

understanding of the world and discover personal meaning through an affirmation of their own values and commitments (Perry, 1970).

Baxter-Magolda's (1992) qualitative research focused on students' perceptions of the nature of knowledge and the role of gender in their changing patterns of reasoning. She describes different kinds of "knowers" which are gender-related but not gender "dictated." These four distinct "ways of knowing" range from the most basic – in which learning is a question of acquiring information and repeating – to the most complex – in which students evaluate a variety of opinions before finally forming their own. Through the data gathered in her interviews, Baxter-Magolda infers how peer relationships, student organizations, educational advising, internships, employment and international or cultural exchange can support and develop complex learning.

Upcraft (1995) asserts "probably no other theory of student development has been more cited, used and researched than Chickering's (1969) original seven "vectors of development" (p. 16). Chickering and Riesser (1993) revised the seven vectors to make them more applicable to the increasingly-diverse student populations on college and university campuses. In summary, these revised seven vectors include: a) developing intellectual, physical and manual and interpersonal competence; b) managing emotions; c) moving through emotional and instrumental autonomy toward interdependence; d) developing mature interpersonal relationships including a tolerance and appreciation for differences and a capacity for intimacy; e) establishing a sense of identity in a social, historical, and cultural context; f) developing purpose, including vocational plans and aspirations, personal interests and interpersonal and family commitments; and g)

developing integrity; including humanizing values, personalizing values and developing congruence in values.

Research studies on college student learning and development that focus more on the external environmental and sociological conditions fall under the college impact model. Studies using this approach seek to "document the outcomes produced by interactions between students and their institution's environments. Learning and personal development are a function of reciprocal influences among such institutional characteristics as size and control, such student characteristics as sex and ethnicity, and enacted perceptual and behavioral environments produced through contacts with peers, faculty, staff and others including the types of activities in which students engage" (Kuh, 1995, pp.126-127). Examples of research from this particular perspective and most relevant to this study are theoretical models by Astin (1985, 1993), Tinto (1987, 1993) and Bean (1985).

Based upon the extensive body of college student retention literature, Astin (1985, 1993) argues that students learn and develop best by becoming involved or by investing physical and psychological energy in the collegiate experience. The greater the quantity and quality of involvement, the more likely the student will succeed in college.

> Learning, academic performance, and retention are positively associated with academic involvement, involvement with faculty, and involvement with student peer groups. A wide spectrum of cognitive and affective outcomes is negatively affected by forms of involvement that either isolate the student from peers or remove the student physically from the campus: living at home, commuting, being employed off campus, being employed full-time, and watching television (1993, pp. 394-395).

Upcraft (1995) states that Astin's involvement theory "is probably the most often quoted theory about why students succeed in college" (p. 18).

Tinto (1987; 1993) argues that when considering college student attrition, three stages of student departure can be conceptualized: separation, transition and incorporation. The first step involves separation from the past communities and experiences – family, high school and hometown. A willingness to leave is a trait of students who are most successful in college. During the second stage, transition, students are both leaving their former communities and adopting the new university community. If students cannot withstand the stresses of transition, they may withdraw. The final stage is incorporation into the university community or "fitting – in." Students must establish full membership in both the social and academic communities of college life. Experiences important to first year student success include participation in orientation seminars, good peer support, knowledge of student and academic services, and at least one caring relationship with a faculty or staff member.

Bean's (1985) model of college student attrition builds on process models of organizational turnover and models of attitude-behavior interactions. Behavioral intentions are shaped by a process whereby beliefs shape attitudes and, attitudes, in turn, shape behavioral intents. Beliefs are presumed to be affected by a student's experiences with the different components of an institution (institutional quality, courses and friends). Bean's model also recognizes that factors external to the institution can play a major role in affecting both attitudes and decisions (Cabrera, et.al., 1992). In this particular instance, "family approval, an environmental factor, exerted both direct and indirect effects on student persistence" (p. 145).

Multiple Cultures: Connections or Complications

As noted in the introductory paragraphs to this review, I believe that educational anthropologists provide a body of literature not commonly used when considering student success and persistence in higher education. Higher education in the United States is historically for the privileged. And, as Renato Rosaldo (1994) asserts, "...privilege quickly becomes so habit forming, rather like a vested right, that it is (mis) – recognized as pure merit or as the natural order of things, which must be passionately defended" (p. 213). The privileged have had the power to decide and define who belongs in the university and how they belong. We need to be asking questions about who has been marginalized, who is not in the picture and whose voice is not heard.

Catherine Emihovich (1992), former editor of the <u>Anthropology and Education Quarterly</u>, asserted that the 1990's and beyond would be the decades of the anthropologists in education, simply because the most pressing problem facing all industrialized countries would be the management of cultural diversity in the educational system. She stated, "Because of their deep understanding of how culture and education are intertwined, anthropologists are uniquely positioned to provide policymakers with information that will result in lasting reforms to ensure more equitable societies" (p. 88).

Recent scholars (Emihovich, 1992; Hess, 1992; Mehan, 1995; Schensul, 1995; Schram, 1994), all recognize the "blurring of genres" in the field of educational anthropology. The underlying theme appears to be that ethnography, with its roots in cultural anthropology, is the preferred approach to studying schooling and education and that it allows for exploration of both the local and broader societal issues and constraints. It supports an interdisciplinary approach to the study of schooling and education.

Included in the discourse surrounding this interdisciplinary study is the discussion concerning researcher-practitioner roles. Schensul (1985) suggests that anthropologists offer educational researchers not a new set of "research techniques but a way of perceiving an educational problem "holistically" and a set of theoretical paradigms for doing so" (p. 66). She asserts that "our work depends on collaboration, not only with other disciplines but with administrators, teachers, parents, etc." (p. 68).

The notion that anthropology has a unique perspective on schooling and education is supported by David Smith (1992), who argues that anthropologists are interested in explicating a different reality from that of most educationists/practitioners. He suggests that educational research is driven by a conservative agenda that includes standardized assessment, evaluation to promote efficiency, control and accountability and basic skill acquisition. He states, "The genius of an anthropology of education is in explicating the human dynamic behind the reality and hence, the human possibilities within it" (p. 190). Mehan (1995) offers a solution that blends researcher-practitioner roles in such a way that "communities of practice" are formed in which teachers, researchers and sometimes students and parents are engaged in dialogue about the process of research collaboration. He suggests that when research is generated from the field and not imposed by the university, the questions are quite different – they tend to focus on the practicalities, challenges and contradictions of daily educational practice. Mehan writes that this is congruent with the discipline of anthropology – "to describe artfully and authentically the lived practices of the people" (p. 244). How "lived experience" interfaces with or against the historical, economic and political contexts of the day is knowledge critical for educators' understanding of students and their experiences in the university. Kathryn

Anderson-Levitt (1996) suggests that schools are a "critical site of people's struggles over who belongs – whose languages we shall speak, whose histories we shall learn, whose successes we shall nurture" (p. 139).

Until recently, educational anthropologists have focused on the elementary and secondary grades (K-12) as sites for their studies and have not often focused on colleges and universities. There are, however, several more recent studies that address student achievement in higher education (Eisenhart, 1996; Fordham, 1993; Nespar, 1990; Pottinger, 1989; Tierney, 1993; Truega, 1994; Van Heerden, 1995; Weis & Fine, 1995). Several other studies focus on college student culture and student life (Anderson and McClard, 1993; Holland and Eisenhart, 1990; Moffatt, 1989; Rhoads, 1995). I have reviewed a selected sample of these studies that are relevant to this research study.

In his case study of Miao university students in China, Trueba (1994) presented data that suggested the process of empowerment for the Miao students represented an increased participation in the national and international social, political, and economic arenas and that it took place without destroying the ethnic identity of the Miao people. The process depended on the maintenance of a strong ethnic identification and affiliation with the Miao culture, language and traditions. Modernization did not have to become a conflicting process that created cultural marginalization.

Pottinger (1989) and Tierney (1993) have examined the experience of Native American students in higher education. Pottinger looked at student data using a comparative research frame to contrast Native American students with Anglo-Americans. The failing Native American transfer students appeared to "self destruct" – to run into a wall, despite previous experiences in higher education and despite experiences gained as

a minority at an integrated community college. Pottinger concluded that the "oppositional frame is apparently being reconstituted at each succeeding level of educational accomplishment, recreating new cultural boundaries and barriers and requiring a dynamic and adaptive response" (p. 340).

Tierney (1993) used a Native American student's story to illustrate the differences between two theoretical perspectives on minority student college-going and participation. These perspectives inform what actions and policies college faculty and staff implement pertaining to minority students. Tierney challenged Vincent Tinto's (1987) widely accepted social integrationist model as actually being assimilationist for minority students. Minority students had no choice but to commit a type of "cultural suicide" in order to be integrated into the college or university culture. Tierney suggested a critical approach that would necessitate a change in emphasis and organizational structure so that alternative discourses could be heard.

Two authors, Eisenhart (1990) and Nespar (1990), focused on curricular structures and how these influenced the decisions and actions of students. Nespar examined the interplay of students' academic and social experiences in two programs (physics and management) and showed how the curricular structures created opportunities and pressures for particular kinds of social relations that influenced how students performed the academic tasks required in the curricula. The argument developed in this study is that within education institutions curricular structures created pressures and constraints on such conversions of capital, in particular, on conversions of social capital into academic capital. Fields preparing students for positions of power and

status were structured so as to produce cohorts of graduates with shared outlooks, ambitions, definitions of reality and strategies for acquiring and using knowledge.

Using critical ethnography, Eisenhart (1996) explored and compared the production of scientists in a U.S. university biology program and an American work place that employed biologists. In her study, she described how the organizational and cultural contexts of the university and work place produced different kinds of scientific identities. Identities and the knowledge associated with them were formed with and against the hegemony of the hard sciences and schooling.

In order to understand how students experience the institution, to understand their success and failure and to understand the institution's success or failure, it is necessary to approach the problems holistically. Educational anthropologists and other researchers/educators should bring to research and practice this broader perspective along with an understanding of what is going on from the students' perspectives and what it means to them. Again, it is important to consider Emihovich's statement (1992): "because of their deep understanding of how culture and education are intertwined, anthropologists are uniquely positioned to provide policy makers with information that will result in lasting reforms to ensure more equitable societies" (p. 88).

Rural, First-Generation College Students from Southern Appalachia: Complications

As noted in Chapter One, the research question of this study focuses on the experience of: rural, first-generation students from Southern Appalachia at a particular research university. I have addressed the broader issues underlying the question (home and university cultures, college student demographics and college student learning and

developmental theories) and now turn to the specific issues concerning this particular group of students and their experiences at a research university. Through a consideration of the literature presented, it becomes clear why this study is important and how it might contribute to the questions concerning student success which have emerged from my own professional experience and that of other practitioners and scholars in higher education.

Education and Appalachia

Throughout its history, the Appalachian people have been involved in struggles involving both external factors (outside domination of capital, absentee land ownership, a middle class interpretation of the culture) and internal factors (social relationships which emphasize religion, family/kin and a strong adherence to place which forms self identity). When considering educational attainment of the native Appalachian, another struggle emerges between the external factors of family, socio-economic status, ruralness and ethnicity and the internal/school factors of perceived minority group status and discrimination, teachers' attitudes and possible institutional discrimination (Keefe, et al., 1983).

In my review of the social science and educational literature, I found that relatively few studies explore these internal and external issues that influence schooling and educational attainment of children and youth in the Appalachian region. However, the studies that do exist raise several common themes, many of which focus on the influence of family and kin. Rural Appalachia is often described as a kin-based society. The family provides the foundation for self-identity and perceptions about the way in which the world outside is organized (Keefe, et al., 1991).

Several authors describe the family as a "web" of relationships that can be nurturing as well as inhibiting (Bennett, 1986; Borman, 1988; Borman and Mueninghoff, 1983; Keefe, et al, 1991). This metaphor is quite telling. In the studies, the family served as support, provided role models and a sense of personal identity and motivated students. However, at the same time, the family sent mixed messages about the importance of schooling and future professional careers. Young women especially were expected to accept the stereotyped roles of women as mothers, spouses and caretakers. Due to family expectations or to economic necessity, young men were expected or required to pursue blue collar jobs or to leave school and return to the family farm (Cavender, 1981). In these cases, the family "web" served as a type of entrapment in a lower socio-economic status.

In these studies the school reproduces the socio-economic and class structure of the community. The families who are poor, rural or urban, and native to the Appalachian region find themselves in the lower class status, with devastating results relative to the educational success of the students. The lower class students are perceived by other students, teachers and administrators as lazy, not interested in achieving, lacking family support and not very smart. At an early age many of these students are labeled and tracked into lower level classes, resulting in low self-esteem as learners. They are often alienated from the social/extra-curricular activities of the school. By late elementary school, many of the students already felt discrimination and were just waiting to drop out of school, which was their only perceived defense against the dominant societal and institutional discrimination (Borman and Mueninghoff, 1985; Cavender, 1981; Keefe, et al., 1991).

In the limited literature that addresses the college and university experience of Appalachian students, I found the same issues present, with the additional issue of negotiating or renegotiating a self-identity. In her ethnographic study of the ways which Appalachian students constructed their identities in the university setting, Cole (1995) found that the students brought to the university a strong sense of family, neighborliness and personal identity. They appeared to have pride in their Appalachian identities and were motivated to do well in college. Important to these students was the support and encouragement given to them by their families, especially their parents (none of whom had attended college and only a few of whom had completed high school).

In order to gain acceptance in the dominant group, the students often acquiesced to the dominant group norms, renegotiating their identities in ways that were in opposition to their Appalachian identities. As in the previous studies reviewed, the differences the students encountered made them feel marginalized and stigmatized. These students began to feel ambivalent toward their native culture and resolved the ambivalence by constructing negative views of their former identities and of their cultural heritage.

The web of family influence played a somewhat different role in a study concerning women and college attendance. Eagen's (1993) qualitative study sought to "understand the influences of role models and cultural and family role expectations on Appalachian women's decision to pursue, and their experiences in, higher education" (p. 267). All of the women in the study were the first of their families to go to college. Significant role models for these women included people from their families who

"exemplified determinism and individualism, especially women who carried the burden of caretakers in often difficult circumstances" (p. 273).

Important to the women's experience was the role of mother and mate or their other caretaking roles. Taking on these roles sometimes delayed the women's entrance into college and continued to be a part of their experiences as they went through school, and the result was often an ongoing concern about juggling multiple roles and responsibilities. These women tended to evaluate themselves relative to their efforts and abilities to maintain relationships "within a tapestry of interconnectedness" (p. 275).

Cole's and Eagen's studies present very different pictures of Appalachian students in the university setting. Despite positive family influence, the students in Cole's study felt it necessary to abandon their native culture in order to be accepted in the university culture. However, it appeared that even after leaving home, the women students in Eagen's study continued to be influenced by the strong role models in their families.

Focusing on actual learning experiences, Spatig (1994) studied six successful native Appalachian college students in their final months of a teacher education program. The purpose of this ethnographic study was to place these particular students' student teaching experience within a broader social context and to address the ways and the extent to which the student teachers' experiences either strengthened or challenged the prevailing power and socio-economic relations in Appalachia.

These students were from poor, rural families with the expressed traditional Appalachian values; and even though they had successfully negotiated high school and college, they were leaving the program with the same ideas about teaching as when they entered the program. The teacher-training program contributed to the reproduction of

inequality in the culture. The students' educational experience did nothing to encourage them to consider their role as teachers in terms of reproducing or transforming the social inequities and lack of academic orientation which they have confronted and will continue to confront in the classrooms and communities in the Appalachian region (Spatig, 1994). They returned to their homes as teachers, content to be employed close to home but apparently unaware of the difference they could make in the lives of their students.

First-Generation College Students

The students in the studies focusing on higher education were all first-generation college students. Recent literature defines a first-generation college student as the first person in a family (parents and siblings) to pursue post secondary education. (Levine and Assoc., 1989; Terenzini, et al., 1996; York-Anderson and Bowman, 1991). Speer (1993) states

> that many Appalachians who consider higher education are first-generation college students. Conversely, many of the students who come from outside the region are second- and even third-generation college students. This produces a real difference in the amount of knowledge about the infrastructure of higher education and how to gain access to it. Knowing whom to call about what issues, and at what junctures, is a kind of cultural knowledge learned mostly from acquaintance with the system of higher education (p. 21).

Students without this knowledge are more at risk in terms of persistence and college degree attainment.

Research on first-generation students falls into three broad categories:

a.   studies of pre-college expectations, planning, or their college choice

process,

b.   studies which concentrate on the transition between high school or work and college, and

c.   studies which examine the effects of first-generation college students' experiences or persistence during college, typically in comparison with their "traditional" peers (Terenzini, et al., (1996).

These studies consistently "indicate that first-generation students are at greater risk with respect to both persistence and degree attainment than are their traditional peers, largely because of the lower levels of academic and social integration" (Terenzini, et al., 1996, p. 3).

Terenzini, et al., in their 1994 qualitative study of non-traditional students and their transition to college, suggest that further research is needed about the subtle and complex ways first-generation students negotiate separation from their home culture and families. They recommend that further research should probe how first-generation students "maintain or reject their personal cultural integrity and succeed or fail in college as a result of this process" (p. 64). London (1989) offers a similar call for further studies:

> As educators we do these latter students no great favor should they
> become – out of our own awareness – confused, frightened, and
> alienated, only to drift away and drop out. If we – faculty, administrators
> and support staff – mean for them to stay and not become attrition statistics,
> we need a keener understanding of the sensibilities and concerns they
> bring with them and of the difficulties they encounter along the way (p. 168).

Gaps in the Literature: College Student Persistence

There are a number of scholars who are suggesting the need for additional research in specific areas related to college student development and persistence (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera, et al., 1992; Kuh, 1995; Murguia, 1991; Nora, et al. 1996;

Tierney, 1993; Tinto, 1997). Several authors refer specifically to aspects of Tinto's model of student social and academic integration. Murguia, et al., (1991) suggest that Tinto's concept of social integration seems applicable but that it needs to be further refined when considering ethnicity in the social integration process. They assert that "given the important functions of ethnicity for the individual, it is difficult for the student to leave his or her ethnicity outside the campus gates. It is also unnecessary and unwise to require students to do so" (p. 438).

Cabrera, et al, (1992) expand Tinto's notion to include external factors as well internal organizational factors when considering student persistence. Their findings suggest that "institutional researchers and policy makers should consider the interplay between institutional, personal, and external factors when developing and assessing programs aimed at preventing college attrition" (p. 161). Tierney (1992) argues that Tinto has "misinterpreted the anthropological notions of ritual, and in doing so he has created a theoretical construct with practical implications that hold potentially harmful consequences for racial and ethnic minorities" (p. 615). He suggests that researchers use different theoretical models rather "than those that insist upon an integrative framework" (p. 615). Tierney recommends considering the work of Holland and Eisenhart (1990) as an alternative theoretical model in which the stages of cultural acquisition are described as stages of increasing individual expertise and identification with a given cultural system.

Tinto (1997) expands his own model of social and academic integration in a research study that focuses on the classroom as the "crossroads" where the social and academic meet. He suggests that though "higher education has not ignored the

classroom, it has not seen it as the centerpiece of efforts to promote student persistence, preferring instead to locate those efforts outside the classroom in the domain of student affairs" (p. 599). Acknowledging the many changes in the student population, his theory is that student experience outside of the classroom has changed, but their experience within the classroom has not and thus urges researchers to pursue the linkage between learning in the classroom and persistence.

Gibson (1984), Kuh (1995) and Berger and Braxton (1998) acknowledge the critical roles that organizational attributes play in college student persistence. Gibson (1984) suggests the need for an educational environment in which culture is "shared" and that shared cultural competence leads to an exploration of similarities and differences thus promoting the acquisition of multicultural competencies. She encourages social scientists and educational researchers to explore the relation between the maintenance of group boundaries within organizations and the "development of cultural competence across such boundaries" (p. 115).

Kuh (1995) encourages institutions seeking to enhance learning to pay more attention to encouraging students to take advantage of existing education opportunities, many of which are outside of the classroom. His research showed that key to successful learning is applying knowledge gained in the classroom to other areas. Kuh challenges educational researchers to determine if the institution's "ethos" (culture characteristics) "values holistic approaches to learning and student participation in all aspects of institutional life" (p. 150).

The findings in Berger and Braxton's (1998) study provide strong support "for the inclusion of organizational attributes as a potential source of social integration" (p. 116).

They suggest that future research should look to organizational theory as a means for helping to "explain the student departure puzzle" (p. 116). Specifically, they refer future research efforts to the more comprehensive models of organizational theory presented in the work of Bolman and Deal's (1992) four frames of organizational behavior and Birnbaum's (1988) models of how colleges work.

The "lay of the land"

It is apparent that college students who are from rural areas in Southern Appalachia and who are first-generation students may be at risk in terms of their successful transition from their homes to the university and in terms of their persistence to graduation. As I have gleaned from my experience and from the reviewed literature, these students bring a home culture to the university that may operate differently and sometimes in opposition to the university culture. The influence of rural values such as family and identity with place as well as previous educational experiences, can serve to help the student negotiate the new university culture. However, these same influences may require them to renegotiate their identities in ways that are in opposition to their Appalachian cultural heritage. I have found few studies that examine the experiences of rural, Appalachian, first-generation students at a university. As discovered in this literature review, there is a need for more research studies that address the experiences of these particular students, the connections between home and university cultures, and the cultural boundaries which exist in higher education relative to this particular student population. In an effort to understand, it makes sense to consider the stories students share with me.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

*Sometimes our field texts are so compelling that as
researchers we want to stop and let them speak for themselves.
But researchers cannot stop there, because the task is to
discover and construct meaning in those texts.
(Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p.423)*

In this chapter, I will present the theoretical framework and methodology that
guided the study. Critical, constructivist and narrative theory are discussed in terms of
how these theories framed the phenomenological interviews, analysis of narrative and
narrative analysis. Also presented is a display of the data analysis process based on the
concept of the hermeneutic circle. As Kvale (1996) suggests "The purpose of
hermeneutical interpretation is "to obtain a valid and common understanding of the
meaning of a text" (p. 46).

Theoretical Framework

Because I seek to describe human experience, this is a phenomenological study in
which I will use narrative as both the method of inquiry and the object of interpretation.
Also influencing this study is my point of view as a qualitative researcher and those
theories that provide the lens through which I view the study: constructivism and critical
theory.

Phenomenology differs from other qualitative or descriptive approaches because
its focus is the subject's experienced meaning rather than the researcher's observations of

the subject's behavior (Kramp, 1995; Polkinghorne, 1989). In telling our stories, we are making meaning of our experiences in the world. From the perspective of phenomenology, a person's life-world is a socially-contextualized totality in which experiences interrelate coherently and meaningfully (Thomson, et.al., 1990). Telling stories is how we understand the world and how we construct our identity relative to that world.

Constructivist thinking emphasizes the world of experience as it is lived, felt and undergone by social actors. The constructivist

> believes that to understand this world of meaning one must interpret it. The inquirer must elucidate the process of meaning construction and clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of social actors. To prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings; it is to offer the inquirer's construction of the constructions of the actors one studies (Schwandt, 1993, p. 118).

Constructions held by people are derived from their experience and interaction with their contexts (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). I will study the "constructions" of the actors or the students' stories of their experiences and will construct a reading of those experiences through analyses of narrative and the writing of a meta-narrative (narrative analysis). These two processes (analysis of narrative and narrative analysis) will be discussed in the data analysis section of this chapter.

Because I am particularly concerned with interpreting the students' stories and hearing the voices that traditionally have not been heard in the university, critical theory informs how I think about and interpret their stories (Speer, 1993). Tierney (1993) suggests that at the core of this approach is the recognition that power, knowledge, ideology, and culture are inextricably linked to one another in constantly changing patterns and relationships. Critical researchers not only observe the constraints placed on

people but also the possibilities for change and action. Through narrative inquiry, educational researchers can demonstrate how institutional cultures often marginalize and silence different groups and describe how relationships to and within the specific cultures have possibilities for bringing about change.

Narrative Inquiry

The investigation of narrative (narratology) has its roots in several disciplines and cuts across a number of areas such as literary theory, history, anthropology, theology, psychology and linguistics. Because narrative focuses on human experience, it is a fundamental structure of human experience, and because it has a holistic quality, it has played an important role in many disciplines (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). Cortazzi (1993) urges educational researchers to use this knowledge and to draw on the insights and models already developed in the numerous multidisciplinary efforts at narrative research.

Several scholars present nonfictional educational storytelling -"stories about the lives of schoolpeople" (Barone, 1992, p. 15) as a form of narrative inquiry (Barone, 1992; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; McLaren, 1993; McLaughlin and Tierney, 1993; and Polkinghorne, 1989). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) describe the study of narrative (stories) as "the study of ways humans experience the world" (p. 2). Referring specifically to students, they continue their discussion of narrative inquiry as follows:

> In understanding ourselves and our students educationally, we need an understanding of people with a narrative of life experiences. Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of school experiences (p. 3).

Narrative meaning draws together human actions and the events that affect human beings. Polkinghorne (1989) describes the "realm of meaning" as an activity with its primary dimension being time and its sequential parts of action. Narrative configures actions and events into a whole episode, which contributes to a particular outcome. When I ask, "what does that mean?" I am asking how something is related or connected. It is the connections or relationships among events that is their meaning. To study narrative meaning is "to make explicit the operations that produce its particular kind of meaning, and to draw out the implications this meaning has for understanding human existence" (p. 5).

Scholars agree that all stories are narratives but not all narratives are stories (Bruner, 1989: Polkinghorne, 1989; Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995; Sandelowski, 1991). Narratives assume many different forms. "They are heard, seen and read; they are told, performed, painted, sculpted and written. They are international, trans-historical and trans-cultural: 'simply there, like life itself'" (Roland Barthes, (1982) in Sandelowski, 1991, p. 162).

Polkinghorne (1989) suggests a more specific meaning of the term narrative. Narrative is the kind of organizational scheme expressed in story form. Narrative refers to both the process of making a story and the result. It is both the phenomenon and the method. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) refer to the phenomenon being studied as story and the research inquiry used as narrative. They describe narrative inquiry in the following way: "people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them and write narratives of experience" (p. 2).

In telling our stories, we make meaning of our experiences in the world. It is how we understand the world and how we construct our identity relative to that world. McLaren (1993) writes, "Narratives form a cultural contract between individuals, groups, and our social universe" (p. 202). Since stories give our lives meaning, it is important to understand what those stories are and to examine the influence they might have on us.

Bruner (1989) proposed a similar theory that life narratives reflect the notions and prevailing theories about possible lives that are a part of one's culture. We can characterize a culture by the narrative models it provides for describing the course of a life. He emphasizes this point as follows: "eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very 'events' of a life. In the end we become the autobiographical narratives by which we 'tell about' our lives" (p. 15).

McLaren's (1993) thesis is that all cultural identities "presuppose a certain narrative intentionality and are informed by particular stories" (p. 202). In the process of telling stories, we use different kinds of narratives to tell different kinds of stories and we also sanction certain narratives and discount others for ideological and political reasons. We are shaping our own identities as well as the identities of others. Therefore, narratives can become politically enabling or serve as strategies for constraint and establish boundaries for difference. McLaren claims that narratives may organize relationships of difference and such a process is "socially determined and context specific" (p. 205). The ways of telling stories can become so habitual that they become a sort of "recipe" for structuring experience – past, present and future.

Bruner (1989) speaks of the need for life stories "to mesh" within a community of life stories in order to avoid alienation. Alienation occurs due to the failure to grasp what the other is saying or what the other is hearing. He argues that a "life as led is inseparable from a life as told – a life is not how it was but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold" (p. 31). Kenyon and Randall (1997) suggest "the way we tell our lives in inseparable from the way we live them" (p. 92). The various levels of stories will "interact, overlap, frequently conflict cradling our lives in roughly concentric fashion. We live within stories (p. 88). They refer to the "larger stories" within which our personal one it set. "Together they contribute to the ever-changing context within which we weave our lives" (p. 85).

Time and place, plot and scene, work together to create the experiential quality of narrative (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). The place or the scene is where the action occurs, where characters are formed and live out their stories and where cultural and social context play constraining and enabling roles (p. 8). Time (past, present and future) is the substance of plot (beginning, middle and end). Polkinghorne (1989) describes plot as "the organizing theme that identifies the significance and the role of the individual events – a plot is able to weave together a complex string of events to make a single story…a plot is constructed in the realm of meaning, recording the relationships among perceptions" (pp. 18-19). Key to understanding plots are the underlying goals, motives, agents and temporality.

Ricoeur (1981) believes that the exploration of narrative can provide a deeper understanding of how humans experience time. He refers to Heidegger's analysis of human time experience to introduce a description of the way narrative functions in

ordering human temporality. In each of the three levels of experience described by Heidegger, our interaction with the world is interpreted differently and time is organized relative to the level of interpretation.

The first level is focused on the need to get around in the world. We have time to take or we take time, then, after, earlier or later. This time is the "in" in which events take place and is referred to as "within-time-ness." The second level, historicality, brings one's level of awareness from the everyday occupation with time to an awareness of oneself as a being with a past who is existing through time. At the third level, temporality, one sees that existence is a unity and that past, present and future are all aspects of one's existence. Polkinghorne (1989) explains this as, "I am that existence which includes what I have done, what I am doing, and what I will do and each moment is part of the whole that I am" (p. 131). Ricoeur (1981) asserts that it is at this third level that plot and temporality intersect. Plot is the intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in any story. It is the sense or meaning of the story.

The events and actions that are integrated in a plot are linked to a person's life story or self-identity. An individual's answer to the question "Who am I?" is a type of narration. The experience of self is organized along the temporal dimension in the same manner that the events of a narrative are organized by the plot into a unified story (Polkinghorne, 1989). A self-plot represents many different kinds of events: accidents, things taken for granted, consequences, roles and personal motivation. It is not merely acted out. The many roles one might play throughout a life story (sweet child, good student, and loving mother) represent different episodes that make up the content and meaning of the plot.

Constructing a self-story or self-identity is actually a narrative in process. It is being constructed and discovered at the same time and is influenced by culture. As mentioned previously, several scholars speak to the role that culture plays in a person's configuration of self (Bruner, 1986 and 1989; Kenyon and Randall, 1997; McLaren, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1989). Cultures provide different plots that one could adopt in a self-story. These plot outlines appear in culture as mythic stories and tales, heroic stories, movies, television dramas and programs, novels and such and are influenced by narratives of class, race, ethnicity and gender. Establishing a sense of identity can involve constructing a meaningful story out of unintegrated fragments of events and actions through emplotment, a process that leads to a sense of completeness and wholeness. The content of each life plot is unique but it can share the characteristics of a general plot outline present and expressed through culture.

Narrative and Student Stories

Narrative reflects the experience of one's own life and action. Through emplotment (the configuring of events and actions into a meaningful plot), the narrative form constitutes reality into wholes and gives meaning to life. Knowledge of this meaning can be gained through interpretive analysis leading to an increased understanding of human existence and identity. Life's narratives are the context for making meaning of specific situations. I propose that students' stories provide the context for understanding how students experience the university and from the interpretive analysis of their stories (their point of view) a meta-narrative of their shared experiences will emerge. Through an additional analysis of the meta-narrative, I will

arrive at a clearer understanding of the experience of these particular students within the university culture.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) state that narrative inquiry "brings theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived" (p. 3). Specifically, narrative inquiry would bring theoretical ideas about the nature of students' lives as lived to bear on educational experience as lived.

For purposes of this study, I used narrative as both the research approach (method of inquiry) and the phenomenon to be studied (object of interpretation). The study emphasized narrative, as first told in the students' stories and then as interpreted in the texts of the interviews. Finally, based on the analysis of narratives (students' stories) and the resulting themes and utilizing the analytic tool of narrative analysis, a story or meta-narrative is presented which represents the students' experience within the university culture.

Methodology and Research Design

Role of Researcher

As a qualitative researcher influenced by constructivism and critical theory and using narrative as a process and object of study, my role is one of co-collaborator with the researched, the students. Mishler (in Polkinghorne, 1989) states, "If we wish to hear respondents' stories, then we must invite them into our work as collaborators, sharing control with them, so that together we try to understand what their stories are about" (p. 164).

Connelly and Clandinin (1994) emphasize that narrative inquiry is a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds. The two narratives of participant and researcher become a shared narrative construction and reconstruction throughout the inquiry. In this way, I was engaged with the students in several levels of narratives: the personal narrative (student stories) and the jointly-constructed narratives that are told in the research text. The final level of narrative is the research story, which is my voice as the researcher.

To assist in exploring and minimizing researcher bias, I participated in a bracketing interview in which I responded to the same open-ended question I asked the student participants. This gave me the opportunity to explore possible preconceptions I had about the undergraduate collegiate experience and this particular group of students. The process of bracketing refers to the methodological procedures that allow for seeing the text from a phenomenological perspective without predefining participants' experiences in terms of the interpretive process (Thompson, et.al., 1990, p. 347). The hour-long interview was conducted with a member of my dissertation committee who has extensive qualitative interview experience. The interview was transcribed and was then analyzed by the committee member and me to identify any themes relative to the research process. As I described my experience as a college student it became apparent that the influence of home and family was not central and I considered the college campus and surrounding town my home. The mentoring relationships with faculty and staff were key to a strong identification with the college community and my major. Also, initially the social adjustment was difficult due to the diverse life styles present on the campus. The experience was new and surprising as an entering first-year student but it was evident that

I considered the undergraduate experience as perhaps some of the most informing and exciting years of my life. The importance of such an interview and the resulting feedback was to bring to my awareness any preconceptions, biases or assumptions that might influence me as a researcher. I took these potential biases into account as I interviewed the students and as I proceeded through the data analysis and writing of the research.

Research Participants

The researched (the students) are the only ones who can initially tell their stories and as collaborators must participate in the framing, writing and finally assenting to the narratives and texts which represent their lives. Lincoln (1993) states that "in this way, the silenced, in becoming producers, analysts, and presenters of their own narratives, cease to be the objects of their histories and knowledge. They are enabled instead to become the agents of the stories which are produced and the agents and instruments of their own change processes" (p. 43).

In order to collect and analyze students' stories, eight university students who were first-generation and who were from rural areas of Southern Appalachia were interviewed two times. Participants were enrolled as full-time students (12 or more credit hours each term in attendance) at the specific research university, had completed 45 or more credit hours at the university and were in good academic standing. Students with 45 or more hours and in good standing were chosen because they have had the opportunity to experience the many aspects of the institution and had navigated through their student experiences with varying degrees of success. Participants had not attended any other higher education institution and were not married. The students had as part of their permanent address zip codes that fall in the region that includes eastern Tennessee,

eastern Kentucky, southwestern Virginia and northwestern North Carolina. These states are within the Southern Appalachian region and are considered main feeder states for the university's undergraduate applicant pool.

Each of the students who participated in the study was given a $50 dollar gift certificate from the University Book Store. The students contributed a number of hours to the study, ranging from 4.5 to approximately 8 hours. Additional hours given by the students but not accounted for included the time they spent on reviewing and giving feedback on the transcription of the first interview and on the text of their own individual student story as presented in Chapter 4. I feel the gift certificate served as some compensation for the hours they devoted to the study and the contributions they made as participants. The students were given the gift certificates at the end of the interview process and in time to assist them with the purchase of books and supplies for the Fall term, 1998.

Methodology

The study was originally designed to include an initial mailing to eligible students, which consisted of a description of the study and an invitation to participate. However, the narrowness of the original selection criteria resulted in an extremely low return, necessitating the revision of the plan to include less restrictive criteria. Because of the difficulty of finding students who met the criteria, an initial screening contact was made by telephone.

Upon approval of the Institutional Review Board, possible student participants were first determined from a report generated by the University Registrar and based on

data from the university's student data base. The 787 students listed in the report met

the following criteria: birth dates fell within the years 1972 – 1980, enrolled full time,

Spring 1998, completed 45 or more credit hours at the university, listed in good academic

standing and home address zip codes were within the designated Southern Appalachian

states and counties of Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, and Virginia.

Students listed in the report were contacted via telephone. During the telephone

conversations, I described the study and asked for verbal consent from the student to

participate in the study (see Appendix A for a copy of the telephone screening questions).

These questions were useful in selecting participants for interviews who were from rural

areas, not married and who were first-generation college students, information that could

not be obtained from University Records. A total of 121 telephone calls were made to

students listed on the report and 12 of the students met the criteria and agreed to

participate in the study. A number of the students contacted did not meet one or more of

the criteria or declined to participate due to unavailability, summer work or "not

interested." A greater number of male students were not interested in participating than

female students. The final eight students chosen to participate were available for

interviewing during the Summer term, 1998. Two of the student participants lived in

counties defined as non-metropolitan in rural areas and the remaining six participants

lived in counties defined as metropolitan in rural-fringe areas. When asked if they lived

in rural areas, all of the participants described their homes as rural and "in the country."

Several authors refer to this type of sampling as "purposeful sampling" (Lincoln

and Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1998; Patton, 1990). "This is a strategy in which particular

settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 1998, p. 87).

Using the information gathered from University records and the telephone screening questionnaire, I summarized demo-biographical information about the eight students who participated in the study. (See Figure 3-1.)

Name	Abby	Alice	Beth	Jay	Lee	Lindsey	Maxine	Sarah
Age	23	20	21	25	22	23	25	20
Gender	F	F	F	M	M	F	F	F
Classifi-cation of county	TN (metro-politan, rural-urban fringe)	TN (metro-politan, rural-urban fringe)	TN (metro-politan, rural-urban fringe)	TN (non-metro-politan, rural)	NC (non-metro-politan, rural)	TN (metro-politan, rural-urban fringe)	TN (metro-politan, rural-urban fringe)	TN (metro-politan, rural-urban fringe)
Home	Rural – Non farm	Rural - Farm	Rural – Non farm	Rural - Farm	Rural-Non farm	Rural-Non farm	Rural-Non farm	Rural-Non farm
Credit hours	121	68	95	182 Grad 5/98	78	61	118	57

Figure 3-1

DEMO-BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

In addition to what is displayed on the chart, all of the students were first-generation college attendees and were not married. The high school GPA's ranged from 2.44 to 3.97, the university GPA's ranged from 2.08 to 3.81 and the composite ACT scores ranged from 14 to 29.

Interviews

I collected the students' stories through the use of phenomenological interviews. Phenomenological interviews are appropriate for this type of study because

phenomenological questions are questions that ask for the meaning and significance of certain phenomena (Van Manen, 1990). As previously mentioned, it is the "retelling of stories" (McLaren, 1993) that gives students their voice and it is the connections or relationships among the storied events that gives the phenomena (student experience) its meaning. The interview served the following purposes: 1) as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that served as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon (the students' experience of the university) and, 2) as a vehicle to develop a conversational relationship with a partner (student participant) about the meaning of an experience (McLaren, p. 66).

Students agreeing to participate were asked to suggest a quiet, convenient location of their choice for the first interview. I visited two of the students (Beth and Sarah) at their homes and conducted their interviews at the dining room tables. All family members were either at work or gone for the afternoon. The remaining students wanted to be interviewed on campus in my office. I arranged for privacy and an uninterrupted period of time during which to conduct the interviews.

Prior to beginning the first interview, participants were given a more detailed explanation of the study and asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix B) after careful considering the time commitment and the objectives of the study. After signing the form, the students were given a copy of the form and asked to select a pseudonym for use in the research study. The consent form follows the guidelines recommended by the Institutional Review Board and contains information about the study, including the use of a pseudonym, audio taping of the interviews, permission to review the participant's

academic advising file, any risks, and the fact that a participant can decline to participate at any time during the study.

Each interview lasted between 90 - 120 minutes and was audiotaped and transcribed. The interview transcriber had read and signed the "Transcriber's Pledge" form. She used headphones to ensure confidentiality and changed all references made in the interviews using the participant's name to the desired pseudonym. All other identifying information in the transcriptions such as names and places were changed.

During the first interview, I asked the students to "Tell me about your experiences as a student at the university." I explored their stories with them in order to understand the experiences in the fullest possible way. Underlying the primary research question of "What is the experience of a rural, first-generation student from Southern Appalachia?" were the questions concerning a) understanding of the students' accounts of their experiences, b) understanding the meaning given to the experiences, and c) understanding how their university experience connects with their home culture. Included in my interview guide were probes which were used only if the student seemed to be experiencing difficulty in forming his/her thoughts. The probes were also designed to ensure that the experiences of the students relative to the research questions were addressed. The following are examples of the probes listed on the interview guide:

- How did you decide to come to the University?

- Tell me about your first week as a freshman.

- Tell me about your freshman year courses.

- Tell me about your courses this past year.

- Tell me about a typical day in your life.

- Is there anyone who is significant to you here at the University?

- What is different between here and home?

- What surprised you?

- Tell me about where you live.

- Tell me about your family.

I found that initially the students would provide a type of summary about their experience that included feelings, problems, successes and an overall statement summarizing their thoughts. From this initial description, I followed up with "Tell me about…" questions that addressed the different areas of experience and feelings they had presented to me. From that point, the students adeptly began telling stories and providing descriptions that brought clarification and a deeper understanding of their initial summary of their experiences. It was rare that I actually used the probes listed in the interview guide. An interview guide for the first interview can be found in Appendix C.

Once the first interview was transcribed and I had carefully reviewed it for errors, I mailed each student a copy with a letter asking that they read the transcription. I suggested that they might want to add information or delete information, clarify what was written or address new topics and that such notes could be made in the margins of the transcription. After a two-week period, I called each student and scheduled a time for a second interview. I used the time between the first and second interview to listen to the interview tapes, make notes of further questions I had concerning the text and their stories and began to analyze the interview text for possible categories relative to the experiences and stories the students told.

For the second interview, all of the students chose to come to my office, which was convenient for them since the Fall term had begun. Again, I arranged for privacy and an uninterrupted time for the interview. The second interview was also audiotaped and transcribed by the transcriber. I opened the interview by asking them about their vacations, the beginning of school and other related topics in order to re-establish rapport and bring us back to the conversations we had during the first interview. The participants were given the opportunity to revise or add to the interview data. The process of reviewing the transcriptions with the participants is called member checking. It involves the systematic solicitation of the views of participants in the study about the data and conclusions and is considered to be an important validity test (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Maxwell, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

As we talked about the first interview, the students clarified their stories and added to their descriptions of particular experiences. They also made corrections involving the specific use of a word, place or name. At the end of the interview, the students gave me their copies so that I could refer to them in my data analysis and use their written comments as further documentation. We also agreed that once I had completed an analysis of their stories, they would read the texts to confirm and critique the themes presented in their individual story.

Data Analysis

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study and to incorporate validity tests, several types of data and data analysis were used. The first part of the data analysis was deductive in nature and focused on the demographic information collected from

University Registrar and the participants. The data were evaluated to examine the demographic characteristics of the student participants.

The thematic analysis was an inductive process. I developed concepts (categories and themes) from the data and explored any relationships, connections and commonalities among them. This first analysis of narrative was conducted using the individual students' stories. As I developed these taxonomies, I again utilized the process of member checking and conferred with the individual students concerning the themes gleaned from their own stories/interviews.

The themes served to point at or hint at some aspect of the phenomenon under study or the experience of the students at the university. The telling of the students' stories became the means by which they reflected on their lived experience and thus provided the opportunity to reflectively analyze the structural or thematic aspect of that experience (Van Maanen, 1988). The development of a plot required the same approach to data that is described by the notion of the hermeneutic circle. In the broadest sense, "the meaning of the hermeneutic circle holds that a person's understanding of a situation results from an interpretation that is based on cultural traditions of meaning (Thompson, et al. 1994, p. 434). In the process of creating a text, the hermeneutic process involves moving back and forth between the parts to a whole. It concerns the connections and the structure of the experience (Polkinghorne, 1988; Van Maanen, 1988). The themes are the story elements relative to each student's narrative. Each student's story is presented as a portrait, which engages the unique themes of that particular student narrative.

The common themes that emerged from the students' stories also served as the data elements for the next phase of analysis. The common themes suggest shared stories

embedded in the larger story of the students' experiences. There is evidence of each theme in the individual narratives but the "similar themes are nuanced differently" (Kramp, 1997, p. 68). Kramp describes each common theme as a "continuum of experience" (p. 68) along which is revealed the particular experiences of the students. The common themes that emerged across the students' stories are discussed along with the "nuances that individualize them" (p. 68).

A final analysis of the themes is an emplotted narrative or a meta-narrative of the shared students' experiences within the university. I refer to this narrative analysis as a "proposed" story because the emplotment of the data elements is retrospective. It is linking the past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about. Polkinghorne (1988) advises the researcher to continuously test the beginning attempts at emplotment with the database (themes). If themes described in the data conflict with or contradict the emerging plot idea, then the idea or narrative needs to be adapted to make sense of the elements and their relationships.

The third type of analysis involved a document analysis of the written interview notes, academic history, curriculum planning sheets and other advising documents that were in the students' advising files. Patton (1990) asserts that "documents provide valuable information because of what the researcher can learn directly by reading them; but they also provide stimulus for generating questions that can only be pursued through direct observation or interviewing "(p. 235). Advising interview notes made by advisors typically contained comments about academic goals and issues that were affecting academic progress and course selection. Such information provided insight and understanding relative to academic decisions made by the student. The documents also

gave a sense of the interaction(s) and communication between the student and faculty advisor and the success or difficulty the student was having as they attempted to navigate the university culture. The information gleaned from the documents served to verify certain aspects of the students' stories and were used in the discussion sections of this study.

Validity Checks

Part of the design of a narrative study is to consider "validity checks" in order to increase the credibility of your conclusions (Maxwell, 1998). I have included several strategies that will test the validity of my study and the conclusions. The first strategy is to incorporate triangulation into the design.

The concept of triangulation is based on the assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators, and methods (Creswell, 1996). A combined methods study uses multiple data collection and analysis. For this study, I have proposed using primarily inductive analysis (narrative analysis, analysis of narrative and document analysis) combined with a secondary analysis using deductive analysis (demo-biographic analysis). This approach also involved using combined data collection methods (demo-biographical, phenomenological interview and documents).

A second strategy used for validation purposes is member checking. At several points during the study, I reviewed the interview transcripts, the thematic analysis and resulting narratives with the participants. This process ensured that the data and

conclusions had not misinterpreted the meaning of what the participants said and the perspectives they had about what is going on.

The final strategy I used to ensure validity was to solicit feedback from those who are familiar with my study and from scholars whose expertise is in the area of Appalachian Studies. Before the study began, I participated in a bracketing interview that helped me ascertain any biases and/or assumptions I had concerning the participants, home and university cultures. During the study, I had conversations (either in person, by e-mail or by telephone) with several faculty whose scholarship focus is Appalachian Studies or qualitative research methods.

Data Analysis Display: Hermeneutic Circle

The purpose of hermeneutical interpretation is "to obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of a text" (Kvale, 1996, p. 46). Eichelberger (in Patton, 1990, p. 85) states that "Hermeneutists are much clearer about the fact that they are *constructing* the 'reality' on the basis of their interpretations of data and with the help of the participants who provided the data in the study." Kvale (1996) explains the concept of the circle as "a process in which the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text. The closer determination of the meaning of the separate parts may eventually change the originally anticipated meaning of the totality, which again influences the meaning of the separate parts, and so on. In principle, such a hermeneutical explication of the text is an infinite process, while it ends in practice when one has reached a sensible meaning, a valid unitary meaning" (p. 47).

In an attempt to follow Miles and Hubermann's (1994) advice that "looking at displays helps us to understand what is happening and to do something – either analyze further or take action – based on that understanding" (p. 11), I have represented the process of hermeneutical data analysis in Figure 3-2. At the top of the display is the "participants perspective" represented by their experience, actual interviews, interview transcriptions and documents. Located at the bottom is the "researcher's perspective" represented by my experience, literature, observations and documents. "Themes"are located on the right hand side of the circle and "Stories" on the left hand side. Each of these four elements is connected by on-going arrows that complete the figure of a circle. The arrows represent the constant, dynamic process of analysis – seeing patterns, clusters, categories and metaphors, integrating information, discovering relationships and making sense. The straight arrows connecting "themes" and "stories" point in both directions signifying the on-going movement /analysis between the themes and stories. My design represents a dynamic display of the hermeneutic circle as it relates to the data analysis in this particular research study.

Integrity of the Research Study and Ethical Issues

It was my responsibility to assure that the reported events and stories were accurate. I considered the students as co-collaborators in the research process and sought their verification of the stories, data analysis and resulting themes on several occasions. If needed, I made appropriate changes and adjustments. I presented evidence (data) to support my conclusions (themes and narrative) along with reasoning by which my results

EXPERIENCE

Participant's Perspective
Interviews
Transcriptions
Documents

Making Sense →

Seeing ←

(Patterns,
Clusters,
Categories,
Metaphors)

STORY
(Narrative Analysis)

CONSTRUCT

THEMES
(Analysis of
Narratives)

Discovering
Relationships →

Integrating ←

Documents
Literature
Observations
Researcher's Perspective

EXPERIENCE
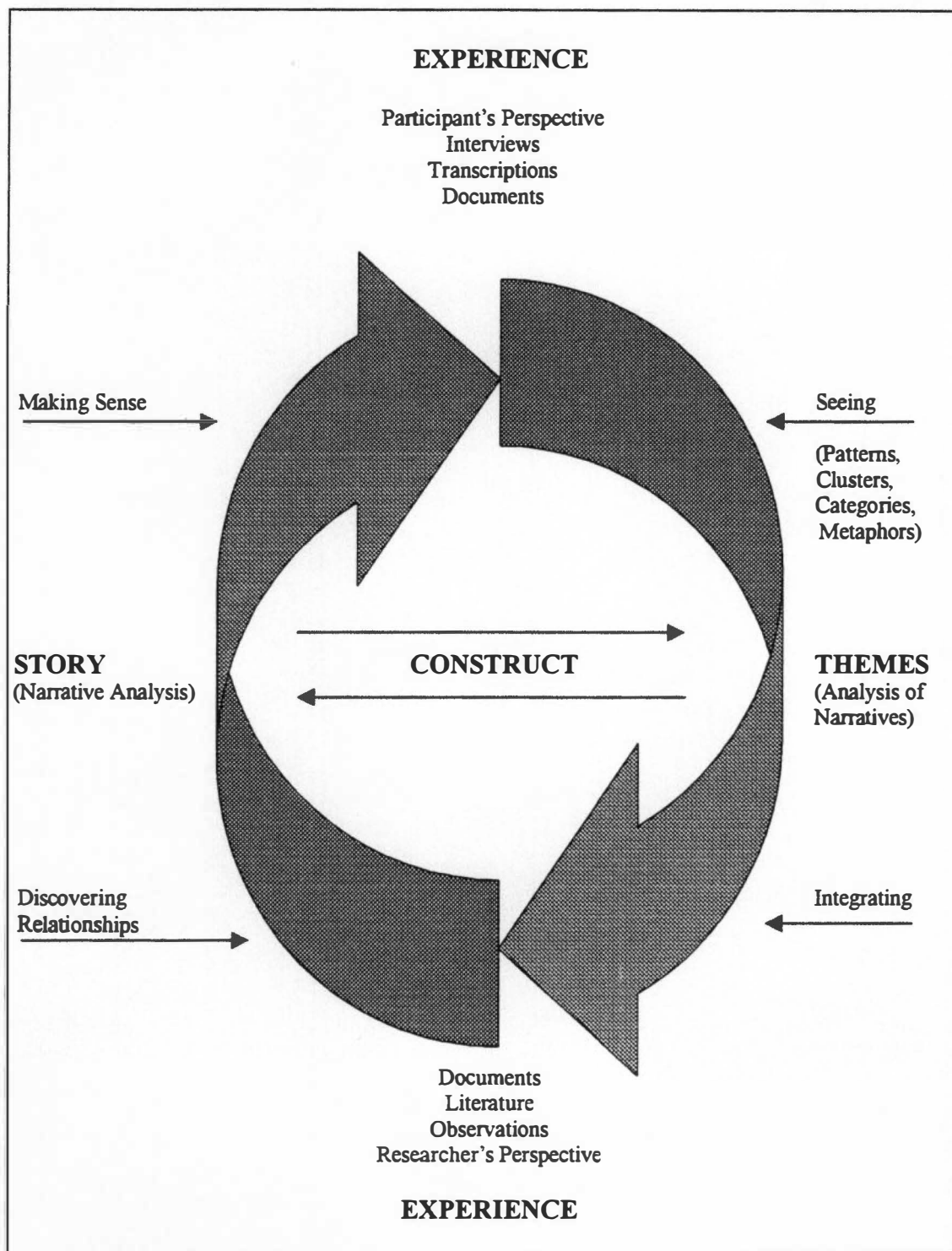
Figure 3-2

DATA ANALYSIS DISPLAY: HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE

have been derived. The informal reasoning or argument in narrative inquiry does not produce certainty; it produces likelihood or the appearance of truth or reality – verisimilitude (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 176).

The interviews were conducted in a professional manner and the students' confidentiality was protected. The first few minutes of each session was devoted to putting the student at ease and answering questions about the nature of the study. Each participant chose his or her own pseudonym for this study.

All aspects of the study are in compliance with the guidelines of the University's Institutional Review Board.

CHAPTER FOUR

STUDENT PORTRAITS AND THEMES

*People by nature lead storied lives and tell stories
of those lives, whereas narrative researchers describe such lives,
collect and tell stories of them and write narratives of experience.
(Clandinin and Connelly, 1994, p. 416)*

The stories in this study were gathered in order to understand the student's

experience of being a student at a university, to understand what those experiences mean

to them and to understand how their university experience connects with their home

culture. In my analysis of each narrative, I analyzed the interview transcriptions and the

embedded stories. I searched for something meaningful, something thematic in each of

the accounts. Van Manen (1990) referred to this process as "mining meaning" (p. 86).

From the various stories different patterns, categories and themes emerged pointing to the

essence of the student's experience. As I worked with each theme, the significance of the

experience as lived and retold by the individual students was made explicit.

Following the analysis of the individual student's stories, I created a portrait of

the student based on the patterns, themes and the connections between them. Patton

(1990) describes this process as a "creative synthesis" or "the bringing together of the

pieces that have emerged into a total experience, showing patterns and relationships" (p.

410). Using these themes along with description and direct quotations from the

interviews, I re-storied the students' stories into individual portraits, which have a

narrative, or story-like structure. Patton refers to such narrative summary as "a useful

integrative device for reconstructing and communicating key phenomena and interpretations of them" (p. 82).

Listening to the students' stories, I began to understand how they not only construct their world but how they construct their student identities. Their narratives reflect not only their individual stories but also the larger stories in which they live. Kenyon and Randall (1997) suggest that "life stories must mesh within a community of stories" (p. 92). The students' community of stories is made up of family, community, school, religion, class, political, culture, race and gender stories. The various levels of these stories interact, overlap and at times cause conflict. The larger "story world" can represent a narrative environment which has its own "authority" and which pressures the students to conform to a certain way of being in the world. Such pressures can lead to a fundamental change in a life story or plot.

Each of the following stories represents the unique themes and larger story worlds of the students. Each is organized around a plot, characters, and setting and has a sense of a beginning, middle and end. The portraits represent the students' experiences from their point of view and represent a co-construction of their experiences by myself and the individual student portrayed in the story.

Included in the title of each story is an implied metaphor that is based on a phrase from the interview text which broadly captures the individual student's experience. The particular implied metaphors used in the titles of each story seem to point at the essence of the individual student's experience and how they see themselves as university students. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, "the way we think, what we experience and what we do everyday is very much a matter of metaphor" (p. 3). They continue by

stating, "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p.5). It is in this sense that I have assigned an implied metaphor – to understand the student's experience in terms of another. Relative to using metaphors in data analysis, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that metaphors "are data-reducing devices, taking several particulars and making a simple generality of them (p. 250). I have taken the phrases the students used to describe their university experiences and assigned an implied metaphor as a type of data-reducing device. Finally, at the end of each portrait, the themes that emerged from the student's narratives are presented.

Abby:
"Figure out a path" – A pathfinder

Abby lives about a 45 minute drive from Knoxville in an area she describes as "somewhat rural" with farms surrounding her small subdivision: "Not too far from where I live, you see people who still farm for a living – there are horses and cows in my sub-division!" She lives with her mother and brother in a trailor and commutes to Knoxville for her classes at the University and to her work at a large grocery retail warehouse. Abby remembers when the roads to her home were gravel with no road signs but now she sees a "kind of modernization" taking place. "I think we had a Quincy's and maybe a little hotel/motel. But, as I've gotten older, it's growing. We're getting more doctors' offices and fast food places. It just keeps growing. We actually have a red light!"

Abby credits her mother for giving her the inspiration to go to college: "My Mom was the one who was very big on education. She never went to college herself but she had this little saying, 'Always reach the goal,' and she kind of inspired me to go on to

college." One of the local community colleges offered Abby a full scholarship but she wanted something "more challenging" and decided to "take the plunge." Other factors influencing Abby's decision to attend the university were its close proximity to home, lower in-state tuition and sharing a dorm room with her best friend from high school. Making the decision to come to UTK and living on campus for the first two years was a very "scary" experience for Abby: "When I got here, I was scared. I moved out (from home) and lived in the dorms and it was a very scary experience."

Hard work has dominated Abby's experience as a student. The first two years of her college career, Abby lived in a residence hall on campus but did not take part in any campus activities or make new friends. Her day was full, going to class, working and completing her homework. "Because I had a job and because I had to be there five days a week and on weekends, there wasn't a lot of time to do the extra-curricular things where I could meet new people and enjoy college. My first two years, I just worked. I just kind of learned how to juggle. It was hard." Abby shared that she had a hard time "adjusting" her freshman year so she "slept a lot instead of dealing with it. I was tired, I was always tired."

Financially, Abby had to work to pay off the loans she had secured to attend UT and to pay for her car. Occasionally, she could depend on help from her parents. "Luckily, I have parents, who are not rich by any means, but if I need it, they can come up with the money to help. It's been a long time since I've had to do that, but I've had to a few times."

After the first two years, Abby moved home because "financially I couldn't do it anymore. I was using credit cards out the wazoo [laughs]!" But moving home for Abby

was clearly a breakthrough in terms of her student experience at the university. "I think I've learned the most by moving back home. I'm the kind of person who has to feel comfortable in a setting to do other work, I mean to explore things. I have to feel safe someplace so I can do these other things. I guess by moving back home, I felt safe enough to kind of explore things more and to be more outgoing. I think that's probably why I opened up a little more my junior and senior year."

Although moving home was positive for Abby, she did report a period of transition when her relationship with her mother was "kind of rocky," her 17 year old brother was particularly intrusive and it was difficult to find a place to study and work on course projects. She credits the skills she has learned in her Social Work major as helping her through this transition: "I think I've used my skills from Social Work and brought them home and it's been a very good experience – moving back home. At first it was a little rocky because it was new again."

During this same time period, Abby was involved in exploring different majors and defining what was important to her in terms of her future career: "I started out in pre-medicine and like a year and a half into that I decided that it just wasn't my cup of tea. I would rather have a life outside of work and I think that with medicine and pre-medicine, it would be difficult to have one. So, it was a big decision that I had to make."

Abby decided on the Social Work major by talking with advisors, participating in a volunteer experience "to get some kind of clue" about the field and clarifying what she enjoyed most in life. "I like to put things together – to problem solve and to think. I like to be challenged and to see how people change. It's very rewarding on a personal level, not necessarily financial." Abby is very concerned about equal rights – "giving people

equal rights and fair treatment" and feels that the field of social work will give her the opportunity to work with people in ways she values.

Deciding on her major/career was key to Abby's "opening up." "I think once I had some knowledge of what I wanted to do in college, not bouncing around from one major to another, and kind of getting a peer network in my major... that helped a lot." Deciding on a major or "figuring out a path" also helped Abby move beyond her fearful reaction to the college experience. "I think when I try anything new I'm scared at first. But, once I get in there and do it, I realize that it's not so bad. And, a lot of times I even have fun with it. But my first reaction is generally to be scared. So, once I got here and did what I needed to do...figure out a path that I was taking through college, I wasn't so scared anymore. I've gotta prove I can hold my own up here. It was a good feeling when I realized I could."

As Abby talked about her learning, she reflected on how she had grown personally through her coursework and practicum experiences in her major. "Social Work teaches you to learn about yourself. Many of those classes bring up stuff and they force you to deal with it. I think that is one of their goals because we are dealing with people and we have to know how their situations are going to make us react – what in our past or in our present makes us react that way. So, definitely, I think that the hardest part for me, but the best, most helpful, was to learn about me. To learn about myself and what makes me react the way I do."

Abby disclosed how she learned that she was a "distant person – pushing people away and not meaning to" and she has discovered that she is a very curious person who likes to explore and seek out new experiences. She is also "working on" her sense of

"low self-esteem" and a somewhat "pessimistic attitude." Abby is very proud of just recently being more "outspoken" and more "confrontive" without being "abrasive." Her field professor told Abby she was able to confront without causing a client to become defensive due to her gentle communication style. Abby's reaction was to say, "Sometimes my personality works for me and sometimes against me."

Abby respects professors who listen to the students, take time to talk with the students and who acknowledge "when we do something good." She noted one of her social work professors as really caring about her and listening to "my ideas and thoughts." To Abby, he represented the ideal of what social work is about and was "very ethical." A chemistry professor provided Abby with a "challenge" through the coursework. "I think that's why even though chemistry wasn't wonderful, it challenged me to think about why this happens and why that happens…to work out the math equations. You have to figure it out. I like to be challenged in that way." An English composition instructor encouraged Abby to "write from the heart" and instilled in Abby an appreciation for writing. This instructor was the first teacher to tell Abby that she "wrote something worthwhile." Abby has now carried an enthusiasm for writing throughout her "college career."

According to Abby, "true learning" takes place when she is "doing it." She stated that "she keeps learning from her experiences and just keeps growing." In a class on policy, a professor required small groups to work on an amendment to a law and to present an argument as though they were presenting it to a body of legislators. "It was a very hard class because we had to make that proposal and we had to work in a group and learn to work with others – sometimes that doesn't work very well. We had to pull things

from the Internet, look in law books, look at formats for proposals – the whole nine

yards." Abby learns best when she's "actually doing it."

Throughout her college experience, Abby's family has played a very important

role. For Abby, home is her sense of family rather than focusing on a specific place.

"I consider my family probably the closest social network that I have and the one

that I like to be in the most. They're always there and I know that they're gonna accept

me, pretty much, no matter what…both sides (father's and mother's side of the family). I

guess that's the reason why they're the most important network. I like being with them."

Although Abby's parents are divorced, she has maintained a close relationship

with both sides of the family. She describes her mother as being hardworking, distant, a

factory worker, a caring yet demanding person and a strong woman. Abby described her

father as old fashioned, lives the country life, a hard working laborer, illiterate, caring in

his own way and generally closed minded. Abby's narrative is laced with stories about

encounters with her younger brother and going to the beach and camping with her

grandparents.

Abby enjoys spending time with her family just "listening to their stories and

hearing their opinions – just to see how they are and how I am and how I got some of the

way I am from them. It's a good thing." When reflecting on the content of the

interviews, Abby said, "I didn't realize how proud I am of my family. I'm extremely

proud of my family."

Beginning her last semester at the university, Abby is able to look back on the

four years and tell stories about how she has changed and what that means to her as she

thinks about her future. She is especially excited about rediscovering the "curious or

adventuresome" person within her and carries with her a list of things she wants to do including "sky diving, scuba diving, swimming with the dolphins, and traveling across the country." She realizes that early in her college career, she was too concerned about taking risks. "You know, I used to take those into consideration, probably overkill. I took them way too far into consideration. But now I just figure I should do, you know, just do it." A part of this new found security is the knowledge that Abby "knows my family would not think I was a nut for doing these things."

Abby realizes that in some ways she is not like her family, especially when considering people who are different. She feels she has always been concerned about the rights of all people and fairness and wonders why she didn't take on more of her family's very conservative position on diversity. Relative to her UT experience, Abby stated, "There's much more diversity here than I ever experienced – different religions, different sexuality, preferences, different colors, the whole rainbow. I guess I've always had my opinions, but I never really expressed them and when I got to college, I learned that's not right! I think I just learned to stand up more for diversity. Before, I had never stood up for anybody."

A new way of expressing herself, a more assertive communication style, and her belief in equality and a fair justice system have led Abby to consider several graduate dual degree programs in social work and law. Abby is an outstanding student who could be competitive in any professional or graduate school applicant pool. "That's something (law school) that has always been in the back of my mind because I do enjoy the justice and equality and I'm beginning to argue for and express my opinion about them. I've learned a lot from reading this (interview transcription) and talking about it and

processing it. It explains a lot. I'm grateful. I've learned a lot and I will learn some more. Maybe I will go to law school! [laughs]."

Themes that emerged from Abby's narrative were:

Family – Support system

Work – How Abby approaches life

Learning – About self

Deciding on a major – Figure out a path

Change – More open

Alice:
"Finding the right spot" – A settler

When I asked Alice to describe her farm to me, she smiled and replied, " I think it is beautiful." Her eyes lit up as she described the rolling East Tennessee countryside, the fields their cattle graze in and the shed that she and her father are building to shelter the cattle closer to the house during the winter. Alice also explained the process of baling hay, chopping wood for their wood stove and repairing a broken pipe in their water well. She laughed as she told stories of raising young calves, leading the one-ton bull around like a dog and catching fireflies with her cousins.

Alice and her father live on their East Tennessee farm raising cattle and the necessary hay to feed the livestock. Alice's mother died when she was four years old. The farm is about a 30 minute one way commute from Knoxville. Alice's father works at a bank as a cash manager during the day while Alice attends classes at the University.

The daily commute "gives us time to talk" and unless there is traffic or construction, the drive is "not a problem." Their day starts early, around 5:30 a.m. Alice and her father feed and water the cows and make sure the new calves are safe before showering, eating a quick breakfast and getting on the road by 7:15 a.m. While her father puts in a full day at the bank, Alice attends classes, studies at the library and occasionally will meet friends for lunch, play tennis or sneak in a movie. By 5:00 p.m., they are back on the road, hurrying to get back to the farm in time to complete the necessary chores by dark. After the chores are finished, Alice fixes dinner for her and her father and then works on homework for the next day. She admits that sometimes the dinner dishes stay in the sink until the next day or even longer!

When Alice was considering going to college, she applied to several schools that offered programs in forestry and biology. She was accepted at all of the schools and was offered scholarships to attend two of them. However, she chose the university because there was "no way in the world I could leave my father...he needs my help. It was more or less the fact that it (the university) was here, and I was close, and it was the closest school. 'Cause it's not feasible for me to live on campus or away from my home."

Alice describes her experience at the university as "overwhelming" at first but she feels that now "everything is fitting together better. It's not so hectic." Overwhelming had to do with not knowing anyone and the thousands of students on campus. "Well, I guess, coming from a kind of small town to a university like this, it's just an overwhelming experience. Cause it's just so many people. I mean, it's so much different than high school because, the first day on campus you don't know anybody. And, in high

school you know almost everyone that's there in the hall with you. But, when you get here, you don't know anybody. It's just really different."

Connecting with the university takes place for Alice through the interactions with instructors and peers in her classes. As Alice talks about her experiences, her stories are about new friendships with students she has met through her courses, labs and discussion groups and the relationships she has with her instructors: "The beginning of my sophomore year, I made a few friends in my chemistry class that I still talk to regularly. We had to do workshops, and we were in groups of five or six. We pretty much kept the same groups the whole time. And there are three or four friends from there that I still talk to regularly. Like last semester I had lunch with Jane and Sara every Friday afternoon."

Alice feels acknowledged and connected when the course instructors know her name and "relate" to her in some way. "I guess it (big classes) mostly made me feel like I was just a number and not a real person. 'Cause they, on all the big exams, they tell you to put down your student ID number and they associated that number more with you than they did your name."

As Alice told stories about her instructors, she connected good learning experiences with instructors who could relate to her: "Well, like the first day of lab he recognized my name and he asked me where I lived and I told him and he said, 'Well, I have a farm near you.' And, so there was sort of a connection there. And, he would use examples in talking about the labs and stuff that he was doing on his farm, so I could relate to that really easily." Her English professor was "young and could relate to us." He "swapped stories about going to parties and movies, and stuff." Alice stated that she did really well in the English course because "I enjoyed the teacher."

Important to Alice are experiences in the classroom that are "hands-on." She likes classes where she can "relate" material to real-life examples. Alice explained her learning style relative to how her father taught her the intricacies of farm work: "My Dad will try to show me something new, and he'll try to show me, or whatever, again, but it doesn't really do me any good until I get out there and try it myself 'cause I can look at it all day but that doesn't help me do it." Her style of learning seems to work best in labs, projects and shared learning experiences with other students. "When I get in the lab, it sinks in, 'cause I can do it."

Alice has clearly enjoyed learning, especially when learning was "fun." When describing her biology lab and the teaching, she enthusiastically related: "He (the TA) was so helpful and the atmosphere in there was so much fun. We would be the last lab to leave everyday, because we had so much fun doing our stuff." Her finite math instructor was "fun" and "told jokes" and "made jokes out of the math problems." Alice noted the grade of A she received in that class as one of the high points of her freshman year. Just recently, Alice began taking classes on the College of Agriculture campus and describes her experiences as "fun" and "I love it!" "I walked out of class yesterday and it smelled like a barn, and I was like, I'm in heaven!"

Before considering a major in Agriculture, Alice had explored Biology, Botany and Secondary Education as possible majors. Forestry and extension work were areas she had investigated during a high school internship program. Now, Alice feels much more focused on her academics and relieved because "I finally decided what I want to do the rest of my life." Alice summarized this decision process in the following story:

"And so I got to thinking...I was looking at majors on the ag. campus and I found ag. education and it's so wonderful. I've always wanted to do something when I finally get out of school where I can be outside most of the time and since I grew up on a farm, I wanna share the outdoors with people. And, just teach them what I know about farming. If I taught Biology, I wouldn't be able to do as much hands on stuff. Since agricultural education is mainly a vocational thing, then we would get to plant a garden, keep cows and stuff like that. You get to travel, but you're mainly based in one place and it would give me the opportunity to be outside, be around animals, be around agriculture." Alice describes this process as "finding the right spot."

As Alice told stories of her student experiences at the university, it was apparent that balancing the daily responsibilities of home/farm life and student life is a constant challenge to her. She does feel that balancing the work is "getting easier." Alice and her father work as partners on the farm chores. Her response to an inquiry about responsibilities on the farm was an emphatic, "I do everything!"

Further conversations revealed that the partnership with her father diminished when the responsibilities were focused on "keeping the house." Alice feels that the housework, cooking, and cleaning often fall to her. Related to this issue is a recent conversation Alice had with her father concerning how he has "raised her." "As I get older, I think my Dad is sort of wishing that he hadn't raised me as much as a tomboy, because now, he's trying to get me to be a housemaker. I told him, 'I hate doing dishes as much as you do, even more!' You know, I'm just not into that. I clean...but, I'd rather be outside mowing the yard. He's really afraid that nobody would want a tomboy

for a wife." Several times during our conversations, Alice mentioned the dirty dishes sitting in the sink for several days before she had the time to clean up the kitchen.

As Alice pursued majors in the biological sciences, she struggled with the prerequisite courses of chemistry and physics and referred to the "heavy load." She enjoyed her freshman chemistry class because of the interaction with her peers in "workshops" but needed to repeat the course during a summer session. She talked about the difficulty she had learning in large lecture classes. "We'd go into lecture and it would all bounce off of me. I wouldn't absorb any of the information. It would just be somebody standing up there talking and me writing. I would look at the notes later and I would think, I don't remember that or how did he do that? You feel like you don't know anybody, and like, you're the only person in there, like you have your own little world in that big class." Alice expressed relief that in her new major, Agricultural Education, she does not need to take the second year of chemistry or physics and will be enrolled in the smaller courses in the College of Agriculture.

Although she described her university experience as being "overwhelming," Alice admits that "overwhelming" is both negative and positive. She sees herself as changing into a "totally different person": "I guess the whole college experience has been that (change). I mean my freshman year I would not have dared to talk to somebody sitting beside me in a lecture. But, this year, it's like, I don't care. I mean, I strike up a conversation with them. I have just sort of become more friendly, in a good way. 'Cause in high school I was in second place for the shyest in my senior class!" Change also involves being "more open" to the diverse student population. Alice told the following story about differences: "I'm a little more open to differences now. I guess, like

differences in people, like how they dress, how they look, how they act. 'Cause in high school, I was a little more hesitant to go up to somebody who dressed a little weird, or something. And now, it's like, I have friends that look weird, and act weird and talk weird. It's no big deal. We were all rednecks in high school!"

Alice also credits the college experience as helping her learn to be more independent and "to do things by myself." She used the research interviews as an example; "I think my freshman year, I would have been so nervous to come in here. I would have been shaking [giggles]!"

Alice is a successful and responsible student at the university. She has had academic difficulty in large science courses but is moving to a major where these classes are not required. According to university records, Alice has used the academic advising resources and followed university academic policies and procedures. She has moved through the major exploration process to, as she says, "the right spot" or her declared major. As a rising junior, she feels more in control of her farm/home responsibilities and student responsibilities; although, her father is questioning the "tomboy" identity relative to a future role as a "wife." Looking forward to her academic work and future career, Alice is eagerly pursuing her coursework on the Agriculture campus where she "loves it." "I walked out of class yesterday and it smelled like a barn, and I was like, "I'm in heaven!"

Themes that emerged from Alice's narrative were:

Home/family – Farm and father

Connecting through relationships – Knowing

Learning – Hands on

Change – A whole new person

Beth:
"It's what you make of it" – An artist

Beth lives in a doublewide trailer next to her paternal grandparents. Her aunt

lives next door, her maternal grandparents live three miles away and the rest of her aunts,

uncles and cousins live within 15 miles of her home. Even though her home is just

minutes from the interstate in upper East Tennessee and not far from a growing mobile

home development, the immediate countryside is farmland, ridges and wooded areas. I

met Beth at her home after she had finished working at a county social services agency

for the day. Her mother was at work at a local textile plant, her father was working at a

car/body shop, in Knoxville and her younger teenage brother was gone for the afternoon.

The surroundings were country and peaceful – a wooded stream and one-lane bridge

completed the pastoral picture!

The first two years Beth attended the university she lived in the residence halls

because her parents were uneasy about her driving the hour commute twice a day. She

said she never really "had a bond with the university" and viewed the residence hall that

she lived in as "unfriendly." At the end of her sophomore year, she and her parents

decided she would move home for a number of reasons. "I decided to move home when I

was a junior because I was taking out loans that just weren't necessary and it just wasn't

worth the debt that I was incurring to live there. I've enjoyed commuting. It hasn't been

a problem for me. I would say it's definitely better for me than living over there

(university). I've retained most of my friends from high school and those are the people

that I'm close to, even now. I never joined anything on campus; I just wasn't interested. And, I'm really involved with my church. I've never really liked the city. I like to take walks at night without having to be afraid. I didn't like the *feeling* that I had over there."

Although Beth had received full scholarship offers from two other state universities, she chose to attend this particular university because it was "close" and she realized that she "liked to be around home." Key to wanting to stay close to home was the desire to maintain a relationship with her high school boy friend. "We've grown up together. Our grandmothers were friends before we were born. He's my high school sweet heart."

Beth had visited the university several times during high school with her journalism class and with the Future Teachers of America organization and felt "at home" on campus and enjoyed meeting the "friendly" staff and professors. In order to attend the university, Beth had to secure outside sources of funding including scholarships, loans and her own money from part time jobs. While she has been a student, Beth has worked part-time jobs during the summer to help with expenses.

Beth's student experience focuses on her academic life. Even when she lived on campus, she "went home almost every weekend" and was not really "interested in making friends on campus." At the same time, Beth enjoyed many of her classes and says, "this is how I pictured college." Beth considers small classes where instructors/professors know her name as "a bonus." Her Geology class had over 200 in it and she said, "I didn't feel I was being short changed. I pictured college that way, like in those movies. There is this great big lecture hall. So, when I had small classes and

professors who knew my name and made it a point to know everybody's name, I just felt lucky." Beth also admits that she likes big classes because she does not have to worry about being called on in class or "having to participate."

Beth has been fairly focused on a teaching career since she was in high school and has already been interviewed and accepted into the teacher preparation program at the university. She says of herself, "A lot of things fascinate me. That's probably why education is good for me." However, her summer job as an assistant at a social services agency caused her to reconsider her career goals. "So, here I am in my senior year thinking (about change). I really think there were higher powers that led me to the job I'm in. I saw how sometimes people are treated and I just thought that changes needed to happen. So, I don't know…I don't know where I'm exactly headed."

Reexamining her career goals (teaching or social work) and her "compassion for and interest in children" helped Beth become clearer about her ideas for the future. "I kind of see myself graduating in May and doing my internship and I *plan* on teaching. I still think I might do some volunteer stuff in social work but in my job I could see how it would be very easy to get burnt out – even more so than in teaching." As Beth goes into her senior year, she is looking forward to taking her education courses and "getting back into teaching."

Listening to Beth tell stories about her learning experiences at the university, it was apparent that she enjoyed classes that gave her the opportunity to learn about herself. She especially enjoyed several religious studies courses because "I kind of figured out some things about myself. I'm just so interested in people and what they think, and why they think what they think and especially their personal experiences. And, religion is

something that is so universal. Everybody at least thinks about it. It was really interesting to me to just get a glimpse of what other people think." Key to a deeper understanding of her family and regional culture were several courses Beth took in Appalachian Studies. She studied her own family history relative to Appalachia and took several field trips that focused on different cultural/regional issues. "It was real interesting to see how it changed but also how it comes out the same. I never realized that and I am so interested in those things. I've read all kinds of books on Appalachia now!"

Beth gets frustrated when she feels like she is learning "just for the test." She feels that learning is relevant when she is "learning things that will help me." A children's literature course and a mathematics course for teachers have given Beth the opportunity to learn things that will be "helpful when I become a teacher." She likes to figure things out and stated that "it has to make sense. I can't just accept something. I have to make sure that I really understand it. A lot of times, I just want to know why." Using this approach to learning, Beth appreciates those teachers who take time to listen, are available and who want to help students. It was frustrating to Beth when several of her professors would not write comments on papers or give feedback along with the grade. "He didn't really give us a reason for the grades, he just gave us the grades but I definitely need something more specific than that. I want to know."

Beth's learning style is independent. She does not particularly enjoy group projects or group tasks in class but would rather listen to a lecture, read and learn from talking directly with the teacher or from class discussion. "I do like to do things independently. I hate it when I'm in classes and they continually call on people. I don't

really like that teaching style. Sometimes I can be spontaneous but it's almost like I have to plan. I want to be prepared." Beth especially enjoys learning from stories as told by family or others specifically interviewed for a class project as in her Appalachian Studies courses. "I think that (listening to stories) is really interesting. It's a way to find out about people, where they grew up and how things were back then."

Family and home is a subject that weaves through Beth's narrative and is relevant to all her stories. "All my family lives right here. We all stay in touch pretty frequently. You know it's not just a Christmas thing." Beth describes herself as being a "contradiction, both independent and dependent." She actually feels more independent living at home than when she lived on campus. "Here (home) I can do my own thing. I have my own space. When I lived at the university, I felt I was in a hole, there was not a safety net there." Beth is grateful for the support she receives from her family. "They all encourage me, even cousins I don't see very often send me checks because I'm going to school. They ask me all the time how I am doing."

Very important to Beth is her relationship with her boyfriend, Gary. Beth and Gary have been dating for over six years and he gives Beth credit for helping him see beyond high school and farming to pursuing a degree in Engineering. Gary has completed a two-year associate's degree from a local community college and is transferring to a 4-year state university known for its engineering program. Beth has helped Gary "try new things because he has always been a daredevil (riding dirt bikes), to an extent. Where we're from it's pretty rural and in places like this people get kinda stuck. I've never really felt that way. I think I've always been a little bit more open and he has not." Beth is not looking forward to Gary leaving home to attend school in

another part of the state. But, she is looking forward to the weekends she will spend with Gary "away from his friends and our families. It will be the first time we are really alone."

Beth's relationship with Gary has not always been easy and she remembers times when she felt "no stability or security and felt completely out of balance." Reflecting on those experiences, Beth feels that she has grown personally. "I think it has somewhat changed the way I look at relationships and life. Before I put way too much emphasis on what was gonna happen. I have to have everything organized. I mean, it's part of my personality. I hope to stop doing that so much because a relationship changes everyday, you can't predict a thing like that. Whether or not we stay together, we've had a really good time. So…I consider that growing."

As Beth tells her stories about home, relationships, classes and her hopes for the future, she often speaks of responsibility, independence and "learning more about myself." Beth feels that students who live at home and commute "are a little more realistic" than those students who live in residence halls. Staying at home with my parents "is a reality check because I'm still held accountable. Students who live on campus just do their own thing. This is a completely judgmental thing, but I feel more responsible. I've had to work *so* hard to get what I have." Beth credits her experience of living on campus as giving her more "self confidence" and the knowledge that she "can be out on her own." At the same time though, Beth claims that she is a "contradiction. I like to live at home." Beth appears to have integrated learning, changing and growing with her strong ties to family, friends and home.

The themes that emerged from Beth's narrative were:

Home – Family, friends, church

Learning – I want to know

Relationships – Growing

Major decision – What I've planned to do

Responsibility – Independence

Jay:
"An adventure" – An adventurer

Jay and I first met early one summer afternoon. He was able to schedule time off from his full time job with an auditing firm and seemed eager to talk about his university student experiences. It was easy to engage in conversation with this young man who was soft-spoken, wore wire rim glasses and sported an Atlanta Braves baseball hat. Jay had graduated in May, having completed a BA degree with a major in History along with minors in Political Science and Secondary Education. "Adventure" and "persistence" were two key words Jay used as he began to tell stories about the six years it took to complete his degree at the university.

"Let's see…what would be a good way of starting? Ah, adventure would be a good thing to say first off." As Jay began his narrative, the meaning of adventure took on life. He talked about "struggling" with finances, learning to "maneuver" on campus, "moving away" from home and parents, being "pulled back" to the family farm to help during hard times and having to "fight" his way back into the university after personal and academic problems required him to take a year off from school. Jay's adventures as a student were a "major pain" at times and "a lot tougher than [he] thought" but he says,

"all in all it was a good experience. I learned a lot about myself and about life in general." From a listener's perspective, it was clear that Jay had integrated his passion for military history and a sense of personal history with his life experiences.

Jay's high school senior class in a northeastern TN county consisted of 101 students and of those students considering college most were planning on attending local community colleges or the regional state university. Key to Jay's decision to do otherwise was a good friend and fellow student who convinced him that he had the ability to "go to the university and get a quality education and go into what you really want to do." Once Jay made the decision to attend the university with his friend, he was faced with financial obstacles and parental doubt about his ability to succeed as a student. He explains that "through persistence and talking to everybody I could find, I acquired enough scholarships for my freshman year to cover expenses." Jay's parents thought it was a "big mistake" for him to attend the university. "They definitely knew I didn't want to be on the farm. That was always the big thing." In addition, Jay's parents could not fund the additional expense and "they didn't think I could do it even though I did well in high school. They didn't think I had what it took to finish college. And, that was part of the reason I kept driving to finally get out...to prove them wrong."

Like his friend, Jay entered the university as an Engineering student with the idea that he could combine his agricultural background with mechanical engineering. "I was going to try to help design new ways of irrigation, new tractor design and other farm machinery." For two years, Jay struggled with the Engineering curriculum. He summarized his experience by stating, "I simply could not get it. I could not figure out what they were doing." Adding to his difficulty in grasping the course material was Jay's

problem with understanding foreign accents. "I don't know why but I have never been very good at picking up accents. One semester I had a Russian teaching Calculus III, a Korean teaching Mechanics and Materials and a Chinese teaching Dynamics III. I could not understand any of them. I mean, if I'm spending my time trying to understand the words, how can I understand the concepts? That hurt my grades, hurt my mentality towards Engineering. I tried my best, but I failed."

At the same time Jay was struggling with his Engineering curriculum, he was faced with intense pressure to help on the family dairy farm. His parents were facing a financial crisis and Jay would go home on weekends and sometimes during the week to assist his parents and older brother. A declining GPA and the resulting confusion over his chosen major combined with the obligation to help on the farm led Jay to withdraw from the university and focus on the problems at home.

As Jay reflected on that difficult time, he talks about it as a "turning point" in his college career as well as in his relationship with his parents. "It really hit home when I took a semester off to help with the financial problems at home. I realized that everything I did revolved around my parents, as far as my dreams and what they had instilled in me. This was the first time they asked for help and I could give it to them." Jay realized that going home did not necessarily mean giving up his independence. "Going home really got me refocused on what I wanted and it made me understand where I got started and where I stand in life."

During his time at home, Jay spent a lot of time talking with a friend of the family who was an elementary school teacher and discussing with her his dilemma concerning a major and career. This friend asked Jay, "What do you really like? In your spare time,

what do you really enjoy doing?" Jay's response was "she really caught me off guard

with those questions!" After many discussions, Jay came to the conclusion that since he

was a young boy, he had enjoyed anything that was "history based." As a child he went

to yard sales with his mother where she would buy him "old history texts" to read. "I

love sitting down and reading history books and watching historical films." The friend's

advice to Jay was "to make a career out it." So, after the financial crisis eased, Jay

returned to the university as a History major, seeking a career as a teacher/historian.

While discussing his decision to return to the university, Jay talked about the

importance of the "right mind set." In particular he referred to the importance of a

"college mind set."

> "Once you make a decision to go to college, it's up to you to make the best of it
> and do as well as you can. A lot of kids go to college because their parents want
> them to but more students are now going to college because they want to make
> themselves better, to get a good career in life rather than do whatever back home.
> Growing up on a farm taught me responsibility, respect for people around me and
> hard work. That is a part of life and a that's the mindset you need for college."

This "mind set" provided a basis for Jay to pursue energetically his upper division

work in the History major. Jay views his studies in History as a part of his life: "I can

relate it to life. If you don't learn from History, you're going to be defeated. It happened

then, it can still happen now and we can learn from it. So, I really do apply it to my life."

As Jay took his History courses, he developed relationships with professors who greatly

influenced how he thought about learning and himself as a future teacher in the

discipline.

Jay told stories of three history professors who have helped him define the

attributes he hopes to acquire as a teacher. Dr. Green is "the kind teacher that I want to

be. He is kind of laid back and gets his point across easily. He's ready to sit back and

help you any way that he can." "Dr. Black is the epitome of fun in class. You get to laugh but when you laugh you understand his point and you learn." This particular professor connected with Jay by identifying with him in terms of sharing residences in neighboring rural counties. He would tease Jay by saying, "Ah, he doesn't know any better. He's from ----- County!" The third professor, Dr. Brown, "is so knowledgeable of everything. He has great stories. He could weave a story out of all of the information and just keep you on the edge of your seat the whole time." Jay would like to be a "combination of these three" faculty and is striving to acquire "the knowledge, the ability to interact with the students and the expressiveness" demonstrated in their teaching.

As mentioned before, learning for Jay is tied to the "right mind set." Jay learns by "gathering information, figuring it out" and interpreting what people say and what he reads. "If I don't have enough information, I usually can't make a decision or understand." Jay wants to understand the parameters or requirements and then "go and research – probably two hundred percent more than I should!" He approaches learning in this way, to "understand, to get the proper mindset to pick up the most important concepts and issues and to get my head in gear. For a lot of people, research is not their best suit, but for some reason it comes real natural like to me." Jay singles out as the "high point" in his student career as a research paper on which he received an "A" with the comment from the history professor that it "was one of the best he has read." This acknowledgment of Jay's work "made me realize everything I've gone through to make it at the university – to learn everything." The professor's encouragement has whetted Jay's interest in "graduate school and teaching at the college level."

For the first four years of his college career, Jay lived in residence halls with several close friends from home except for the semester he went home to help with the farm. Jay's comments about "dorm life" focused on the constant parties and "noise" in the dorms. "I didn't like it after coming from a rural area where you hear crickets at night." The last two years, Jay lived in off campus apartments.

Campus life or involvement in campus activities did not emerge as an important part of Jay's experience, with the exception of his active support of the UT baseball team. It was through being a regular fan and spectator that Jay met friends who later became his roommates off campus. Jay's friends were his "safety net" on campus. Jay expressed that he was not prepared for the responsibility and independence when he first came to the university. As a freshman, "you are kind of thrown into it and I was not prepared. There is no one to look after you, unless you establish a good set of friends."

As Jay reflected on his "whole experience" he said (with a big sigh), "I had trouble getting here, starting right, dorm life, professors (good and bad). It took 6 years to get a 4-year degree BUT I'm making good money and that's icing on the cake. I finally get the chance to think back on it. I am the first to go to college – the one who will do a lot of things my family won't get to do. That is a big thing for me." Jay's plans are to continue working for a year to save enough money to support himself as he returns to complete his teaching internship and graduate studies in education.

The themes that emerged from Jay's narrative were:

Farm/Parents – A sense of self

Learning – A college mind set

Finding a major/career – Figuring it out

History – An intellectual home

Persistence – Finishing college degree

Lee:
"Making connections" – A politician

When asked about his student experience at the university, Lee's first response

was, "I wouldn't have came here if it didn't have to do with football." As a teenager, Lee

had been the small town high school's "jock" and had spent many years playing baseball,

basketball and football. Attending college on an athletic scholarship was perceived as an

opportunity not previously available to other family members but an opportunity not

necessarily desired by Lee. "My first option was not college, but it was my family's

option because I was the first one to have the opportunity to go to college. They more or

less expected me to go and now I kind of regret it. I kind of wonder what it would be like

if I was in the Marine Corps, 'cause I like to face challenges. And, a majority of it is not

books. Sometimes I wonder if that would have been a better road for me."

Lee had been offered athletic scholarships at several smaller schools but chose the

university because "it was big and known for football." During recruiting visits on

campus, Lee was impressed with what the players and coaches told him about the

university. "They told me everything that I wanted to hear. There was never really the

factor of education thrown into it." Lee chose to attend the institution even though he

was in the position of "having to earn his scholarship" once he enrolled. His high school

GPA did not meet student athletic eligibility standards.

Also important to Lee was going someplace "where I did not know anybody." Having grown up in a small, rural community, Lee felt as though he needed to meet new people who could serve as valuable contacts in the future. "I wanted to go somewhere I could say I've met all these people. They may have a position for me whenever they get out of school or whenever I'm teaching. I don't know what I'd do if I was at another school where I knew the people. 'Cause you grow up having all these guys and girls in your conference and that's all I really knew." Meeting "new friends" and making new "connections" is an important part of Lee's university experience. "Here, it is really large and I've got to the point where I know people. I just really enjoy the meeting part of it."

Lee grew up in a small northwestern North Carolina town where his mother owns a real estate business and his father works in the local furniture factory. He has two older siblings who live in the hometown area and a number of relatives who live in the surrounding communities. When I asked Lee about his family, he enthusiastically responded, "My family is great...I love them!" Lee told stories about the sibling rivalry which took place between Lee, his older brother and his older sister and credits their "physical" relationship as making him "tough." "They helped me mature. Having a brother and sister that were physical (my sister's a tomboy) and who were beating up on me all of the time really helped. And, I love them for it!" Lee feels a responsibility for teaching his young nephew the same lessons he learned as a young boy: "if you don't stand up for yourself, you lose pride, you lose dignity."

One of the main differences between the small town where Lee grew up and the university is "knowing people." Lee tells stories about the local policemen stopping him in his car, not to give him a ticket, but to talk about local sports happenings or his

experience as a football player. He has already been approached by area high school coaches who discuss future opportunities in teaching and coaching once Lee earns his degree. One of Lee's stories focused on his doctor who treated his sports injuries and who kept information confidential or did not charge for an x-ray. "Knowing people like that means a lot. Here (UT) there are a lot more students and a lot less people who care about you." For Lee, it is important "not to feel alone" and to make connections so when "you're stuck in a situation" you will have "somebody helping you out, someone able to pull some strings. I think it all goes back to coming from a small town, just knowing people and stuff."

Making connections, meeting people and knowing people not only represent Lee's hometown experience but also seem to define many of Lee's experiences at the university. "I really think the main thing with me, from my freshman year until now, is that I'm really glad that I've been able to be open and talk to people. 'Cause, that to me, has made all the difference in being in school here." Lee's stories include examples of how to meet new friends in large lecture classes, discussion groups and small study sessions. His first concern when confronted with a large auditorium lecture course was, "Oh my God. How am I gonna meet anybody? That was my first thought when I went in there because there were more people than I had in my high school! So, I met a couple of people walking out and talking, because I enjoy the talk." Lee told stories about study sessions where the students "order some pizzas, watch the same show or movie, hang out, drift a little bit" and then get back to studying. "You leave and you don't feel like you've studied that hard, 'cause you've sat there and you've had a good time."

Knowing people and making connections have been important to Lee as he progressed through the different sports in his athletic career. His experience on the team with (famous athlete) "is going to be a topic." "I can already foresee that it's going to be a topic of one of my job applications when I turn it in. They're going to say, 'Ah, you played at the university. You played with (famous athlete).' That's gonna help me out, you know." His connections through the athletics department have enabled him to "meet a lot of important people and be in important situations."

Important to Lee's learning is connecting with his teachers. "Dr. Jones *knows* me. I mean he knows it's me. I like knowing the teachers and I like for the teachers to be interested in me and he took that interest and that's great." Lee can only name three of his professors whom he feels cared about getting to know him. Reflecting back on his freshman year, Lee exclaimed, "I think they all hated me! It was a totally bad experience for me and it made everything else look dim." When asked to elaborate, Lee told me about his learning disability (dyslexia) and how important it was for him "to talk" and "ask questions" early in the term. "I know that once we got into the readings or whatever, I'm not going to be able to keep up as much so I'm not going to raise my hand as much. I think I really bothered some of them." Lee's comment about one instructor who would not talk with him was, "It's like he was wanting to destroy me or something. It was intimidating."

It was clear from Lee's stories that learning and academics have never been easy for him. At one point in his narrative, Lee claimed "I've had it hard going through high school and everything. I can say that I probably made it through high school because I played sports. I can honestly say that and I'm sure some of the teachers would back me

up and all of my coaches!" Lee's academic career at the university has presented him

with challenges that constantly haunt him. During his junior year, he finally registered

with Student Disability Services, which has provided him with books on tape, letters to

his teachers explaining his learning disability and extended test-taking time. "If I take

advantage of everything I can get, then it's a whole lot easier on me." Lee depends

heavily on the tutors for help with all of his coursework.

When courses are more experiential in nature, Lee is able to grasp the material

and do fairly well. Lee describes a favorite teacher as one "who is not going to keep you

in class all day. He's a teacher that's gonna get you in there, tell you what to do, what

you need to know and make sure you go out and do it. He's an experiment teacher. You

do all this physical stuff and he'll teach you while you're out there doing this stuff." Lee

is excited about learning when he learns through interaction with the instructors or with

other students. "Everything should be interactive. You learn by experience too – not just

books."

Although Lee has always been interested in teaching as a career, his difficulty

with certain areas has influenced his choice of majors at the university. Initially, Lee

wanted to pursue teaching science but quickly realized that the level of math involved

was prohibitive. The next major Lee explored was teaching handicapped children in

special services education but found that while he enjoyed working with the children, he

did not enjoy the course material. Lee's decision to major in History came as a result of

him "wanting to teach something he found interesting." Also influencing Lee's decision

was a history professor who "was just great because he knew me." It was obvious from

Lee's stories about his history classes that he feels comfortable with the faculty and in

that discipline. Some of Lee's narrative included a lengthy story told by a history professor – "It was a good story with a great point and it kinda sticks in my mind."

Lee has very specific ideas about his future career as a teacher and a coach. He hopes that teaching combined with the "physical" activities of coaching will keep him from getting "burned out." Lee feels strongly that a teacher must feel "enthused about what they teach" and serve as "role models" for the students. Teaching to Lee will be taking the students out to "experience" learning and to learn from "doing it." Most important to Lee is that he "enjoy" teaching as a career and if there comes a time he no longer enjoys what he is doing, he "will quit." In terms of actual future employment, Lee is already "connecting" with former teachers, coaches and staff from his summer camp counselor experience.

Throughout most of Lee's student experience, his daily life was regimented by the requirements of the athletics program and its coaches. "Everything was very difficult" for Lee and he never really adjusted "time-wise" in terms of balancing the rigors of being an athlete with the academic course work. And perhaps most difficult to face for Lee and his parents was the realization that Lee did not "even feel like a part of the program here. I'm not the person they were looking at. I'm tired of getting beat up." Lee's grades never did reach the point where he was eligible for an athletic scholarship. After he played football for three years and struggled through his coursework, Lee decided it was time to quit and focus on getting his college degree. Lee was ready to become independent of the football program. He wanted to "get to the point where I could meet people and just be Lee and they like me for that. Even now when people ask me if I used

to play, I'm like, 'yes,' and change the subject real quick. I don't want to lie to them, but I'd rather not talk about it."

Lee is making the transition from the life of a student athlete to being a more independent student who is faced with making decisions about his daily schedule, course selection, and use of free time. Lee also told several stories about making decisions independent from his parents such as the decision to go to New Hampshire for a summer camp counselor job and not take summer courses. "Yeah, we had to have *the* talk. I told my parents that I shouldn't have to feel like I needed to check in with them. I kind of pushed the issues of control and being on your own. All they (parents) have said to me in the past still has some kind of part in my decisions."

The decision not to play football was in line with Lee's ideas about independence and being engaged in activities which "you enjoy." In many ways, Lee felt "stuck." The decision to attend UT or even go to college was not his own, he was in a football program which was not giving him the personal reward he had grown accustomed to in high school, and his college degree was in jeopardy due to difficulties with his academics. The beginning of a new kind of independence emerged as Lee initiated several steps to take control of his life at UTK. "I chose not to be one of those people who was going to be stuck in a situation where they don't know what to do. I do not want to be someone that's stuck, whether it's in their mind or physically. There's no point."

The themes that emerged from Lee's narrative were:

Athletics – Identity

Family/Home – A small town

Finding a major – Something I'm interested in

Learning – Experience it/do it

Connections – Know people

Independence – Not stuck

Lindsey:
"I don't walk with my head down" – A proud recruit

It was late in the afternoon when I interviewed Lindsey for the first time. The tower chimes from my office building were playing the alma mater and I could not help but think the music provided an appropriate background for the enthusiasm expressed by Lindsey in her stories about her university experience. Lindsey explained that her parents had always been "big university fans" and "proud" that they lived close to the university. "I guess that rubbed off on me. When I was little they always dressed me up in the school colors and took me to all of the games. I've thought about going to other schools, but this has always been my first choice. It has good programs."

Being close to home was also important to Lindsey. Lindsey is the oldest of five children, two younger teenage brothers and two younger sisters. Her father is an electrician and her mother is a supervisor at a vending machine company. "I've thought about going away but I have four younger brothers and sisters I'm close to and I don't want to leave them." Lindsey sees herself as a role model for her siblings. "Hopefully, I'm the first of many to attend college."

Lindsey describes herself as "outgoing and friendly, like my mother." This trait has been critical in what appears to be a very smooth transition to the university. Throughout her narrative, Lindsey would mention her many friends, meeting new people

and meeting her fiancé. Her familiarity with the campus and her ability to meet people easily makes the university feel "like home." "I feel comfortable here. I don't feel out of place, its not too big." Lindsey admits that the first week was "hectic" and on the first day of classes she was "real scared." "I was just driving around going, 'Where am I going to park?' I was almost in tears. I was late to my first class and was so scared to death." "Fitting in" and "blending in" is important to Lindsey. "I really do like it here. I feel like I fit in. I just got to know everything real well, met a lot of people and a lot of friends. It helps. So it wasn't hard."

Although Lindsey adjusted quite easily to the university, the first year was not without its frustrations and stresses. Her days were long and involved an early morning 45 minute commute to Knoxville, taking classes, working 25-30 hours a week in a local bank, and studying when she finally got home around 9:30 in the evening. Referring to her job, Lindsey said, "I had a lot of pressures. If you make mistakes, they take money from you. It was a good job though, they were good people. I worked there for two years. It made everyday kind of more stressful thinking…I've got to go to work." Lindsey is looking forward to her new job which involves working in an after school day care for 4 hours 5 days a week. "I'll still have time to study and do other things at night, instead of working all those hours and trying to get home and study and stuff." During this past summer, Lindsey did not work and took summer school classes. "I think I needed the break 'cause I've been working since I was a freshman in high school. My grandmother owned a convenience store so I worked there. I've never really not had a job that I can remember."

Also frustrating to Lindsey was the discovery that her chosen major of Nursing was "too competitive." After struggling through biology and chemistry her first year, she realized that her GPA was "too low" and she would need to find a new major. "I like a major that relates to life instead of chemistry or biology – all this stuff I'll never need to know." Lindsey started on her search for a new major by thinking about what she enjoyed doing which was "working with children." She then went through the university catalog and found the Child and Family Studies major and followed through by talking with advisors in Nursing and in her new interest area. "Child and Family Studies has classes I'm really interested in and want to study. The professors focus more on real life than the Chemistry department does." Although her parents are worried about Lindsey's future employability, Lindsey feels strongly about doing what "she likes and then the job will come to me. I would hate myself for doing a job just for money, a job I hated."

Lindsey attributes her experiences in certain classes as being critical in giving her the "courage" to change her major.

> I think a lot of those experiences (learning in class) gave me a lot of courage to change my major. Before I was kind of scared. 'Well, what if I don't do this and what if I can't find a job.' But then, so many people were doing so many different things where I didn't even know jobs existed. I was like, ' Well, they're not worried about it. They're doing what they like.' So, that's one of the reasons I did change my major because I thought, I'm not the only one who's scared.

Lindsey describes her philosophy and sociology classes as being especially "eye opening" and perhaps helped her to see things a new way.

> I think they made me feel that I wasn't afraid to be different than what my parents wanted me to be, or what I thought I should be. They gave me a lot of nerve to change, to make me think 'I don't have to do this.' It made me not afraid to make up my own mind. I just realized in that philosophy class that this is just a totally different place than where I came from, that people here are not the status quo. Back in high school everybody wanted to be like everybody else and here, nobody wants to be like anybody. Independence is a big thing.

It was in the philosophy class that Lindsey encountered many students who did not believe in God and she found that to be very intimidating because "I'm from a very strong religious background and no one in my family would ever say that." Even though the experience was "scary" and made her feel "kinda out of place," Lindsey summarized by saying, "You know, it's just their thoughts. It's ok for them to believe that. I shouldn't force my beliefs on them. They have a right to do whatever they think."

Sociology was a class in which Lindsey learned how people "believe different things about the same ideas." She described that class as being a "big debate" and one where she learned a lot about differences. Lindsey agreed that learning in these classes was indeed "eye opening."

Contrary to many students at the university, Lindsey describes her experience with professors as "personal." "I thought I'm gonna have all these classes and I'm not gonna get to ask questions, but I really don't see it that way. I mean, you always have the opportunity, in my mind, to talk to professors. Some of them even give you their home phone number. They want to be more than a teacher – they want to be your friend." Lindsey also points out that she had to learn how to be an independent learner and not depend on the teachers. "They realize that we were paying for this and it was our decision if we wanted to learn or not. And they didn't force that. I learned that real fast! I still need the explanations from the teachers . I didn't skip very many more classes after the first test. It's hard to choose the right thing to do. They are giving you the independence to come to class or not."

Becoming independent as a learner and as an individual have been an integral part of Lindsey's university experience. Independence has involved moving from home to an

on-campus residence hall, learning to appreciate new friends who are different than the "status quo," changing her major, learning in college and making decisions on her own. Lindsey moved to campus the middle of her sophomore year and recites a litany of reasons why living on campus is much better than commuting from home: more time to study, more time with fiancé, opportunities to meet new friends, no parking problems, better grades and no boundaries. "The difference (between living at home or living on campus) is like night and day. I miss my family but it is so good to get away from them. It makes it so much easier to study, to do the things that I need to do without them saying, 'What are you doing?…Can we do this and can we do that?' And, me being the oldest, I'm naturally the babysitter. So, that's changed since I've moved away! If I could tell anybody anything, I would say, 'Live on campus for at least a year just to get the experience of it.' It's just so much different. I really enjoy it." Lindsey summarizes what this experience means to her in the following statement, "You learn to be your own person and you learn how to live for yourself."

Lindsey was surprised that her parents reacted favorably when she requested to move on campus. Her mother responded, "Well, if that's what you wanna do, that's what we'll do." Although, she no longer lives at home, the ties with her family are strong. Lindsey and her mother talk with each other every day on the phone and Lindsey visits home at least once each week. The phone calls are a curiosity to her fiancé who Lindsey explains "does not understand the mother/daughter bond."

Of great concern to Lindsey is her father's long term illness and the intensive medical treatments needed to treat the disease. 'When my Dad got sick, the first thing I thought of was 'how am I gonna take care of all of these kids?' If something ever

happened to my parents, I would have to step in, just like that and I wouldn't think twice about it. There is a lot of pressure on me with my Dad being sick and the younger ones don't understand why he is sick all of the time. Kids know though, they're not as naïve as…they know what's happening."

Key to Lindsey's transition to the university was her ability to quickly meet new friends and connect to the university in that way. Lindsey met her fiancé her freshman year and admits, "that is another reason why I'm glad I came here!" They have been dating for a year and a half and have tentatively scheduled a wedding date next year. When reflecting on significant people around her, Lindsey mentions her fiancée, her roommate and a close friend from home as well as asserting "there are a lot of people, really that have been significant. Yeah, a lot of my friends. Friends that I met here. I need a lot of friends, being a girl, I guess. I just need more people to talk to. I've met so many new friends here that are really, really good friends. Sometimes I just can't talk with my fiancé; he just doesn't understand girl things." Making friends who are different from Lindsey has been an important part of learning for her: "I come into things with a more open mind because before I was kind of nervous about talking to people who were different than me. I've been exposed to more experiences. You just have to get to know people."

Lindsey expresses the interesting paradox of feeling independent and at the same time enjoys "blending in with everybody else." She thinks that "people admire you for being different here and I think people admire me for making my own decisions. It's helpful not to be afraid to make up my own mind." Lindsey confidently describes herself

as follows: "I don't walk with my head down, you know. I have a plan and I know the way I'm going. I just feel like I'm home, kind of. It's just good."

The themes that emerged in Lindsey's narrative were:

Independence – Being on my own

Connecting – Friends

Learning – Opened my eyes

Deciding on a major – Relating to life

Home – Family

Maxine:
"I don't have a clue" – A detective

Maxine grinned and her eyes sparkled when she reflected on her decision to attend the university. "The reason I wanted to come to the university in the first place was 'cause of band. I knew it was a good school but it had a good band too!" Maxine explained that band was her "focus" in high school. She had enrolled in college preparatory courses primarily to be with her friends from band and she successfully auditioned for the university band during her senior year. Maxine told stories about her father taking her to football games and how she loved watching the band. "You know, they all looked so good and their lines were straight! I didn't think it (the university) was a school. I knew it was just football!" Although she was accepted at the university during her senior year and was offered a band scholarship, Maxine decided to wait until she "wanted to go and it wasn't the fact that that everybody else was goin' or this was

what my parents wanted me to do. I decided to go when I wanted to go, when I felt prepared."

After Maxine graduated from high school, she worked for two years with her mother in a textile plant "pairing up sleeves." Her home is in upper East Tennessee and Maxine describes the area as growing. "We have two, no three stoplights now on the main road!" A year and half ago, Maxine's family home burned down. She now lives in a doublewide trailer with her mother, stepfather, younger brother and sister, and a great aunt and uncle. The countryside surrounding her home is "real pretty" with a stream running in front of the house and a view of the ridges from the deck. Her aunt and uncle moved in with them because her uncle is very ill and in need of extra care and attention, more than what her elderly aunt could provide. Maxine describes her home as "very chaotic – everybody's bouncing around my house. Everybody does what they do and so everybody bounces around!"

Maxine felt "ready" and "prepared" to attend the university after a year and a half of working in the local factory. Also, her friends who were in the band were urging her to make the move and were encouraging her to attend the university. "You need to come down and experience this, you need to get back in school before you wait too long." Maxine re-auditioned for the band, was accepted and decided that she was "ready now." She felt she was more "focused on getting the job done" and "prepared" for the challenge of college. To "get back into the swing of things," Maxine enrolled in an Evening School psychology course before her full time enrollment in the fall semester. "It opened me back up to studying. It went really good."

Maxine did not attend Orientation but came directly to band camp previous to fall registration. "It didn't start normal for me like a normal, everyday student. I had band camp." She admits that she "was probably more nervous about band camp than starting school, just because school comes very easy to me. I hadn't practiced (trumpet) as much as I should have!" Maxine describes band camp as "wonderful" and felt she was fortunate to have a friend who "took me through everything and showed me everything." During her two years in band, Maxine met most of her best friends, traveled extensively, was "treated really, really good," and enjoyed the thrill and excitement of performing and participating in a revered university ensemble and tradition. "It's really wonderful. You can't describe it, 'cause you can't hear yourself play. You look up at everybody and think, I'm a part of this wonderful show."

Being in band, commuting from home six days a week and carrying a rigorous course load was challenging for Maxine. "I thought that this is gonna be a little rough 'cause of Biology, English and whatever and I drove here six days a week. It just went by so fast that you really didn't have time to think about it!"

During her freshman year, Maxine dropped chemistry because it "really scared me." "I had never encountered anything like it before. I really didn't even know what a lab was!" Maxine had taken two years of biology in high school but chemistry and physics were not offered so she did not feel like she "had the basics" to do well. Her "fear" of chemistry prevented her from understanding and focusing on the lectures. "When I got scared, I couldn't soak anything in."

Physics has been "like a nightmare" for Maxine. She was able to complete the first level with a grade of D and has withdrawn from the second course. Maxine thinks

physics is "totally irrelevant" to her major (Exercise Science) and cannot understand

why it is necessary for her program. Tutors were too expensive to consider and

university policies on residency requirements kept her from taking the course at a

community college where Maxine felt she would be more apt to succeed. The physics

professor was not approachable and even though the TA was "nice and friendly and the

smartest TA I've ever met," he was not helpful when Maxine "could not understand the

overall concept." Maxine and her friend decided to work hard together and try to "get

something out of this." She was able to pass the course with a "D" and was "never so

happy with a "D!"

Other than chemistry and physics, Maxine has basically enjoyed her coursework

and has done well. She especially enjoys learning from professors and instructors who

are "nice" and who "listen to you." "It makes a difference when they seem like they care.

It's frustrating when sometimes they (teachers) can't understand why you don't

understand and I can't give them a reason." Maxine's courses in her Exercise Science

major have given her opportunities not only to learn the discipline but also apply what

she is learning through several practicums. "Our Department Head is good and is really a

smart man. I really enjoyed his class because we got to do a practicum. I went with a

physical therapist and watched her work. She would let us do stuff like thinking of

exercises to help the kids stretch or work on problem areas. And, he (Department Head)

would come to the site and watch you work which was really good."

Initially, Maxine enrolled in the university as a pre-physical therapy major. After

her encounter with chemistry, she changed to Exercise Science, which requires a less

rigorous chemistry sequence. Unfortunately, the required physics courses seemed to put

up yet another obstacle to Maxine's successful completion of the major's co-requisite courses. Over the summer and early fall, Maxine kept in touch with me and continued to share her frustrations concerning her coursework and choice of major. As she shared her stories with me, a very personal concern emerged which was causing Maxine extreme distress and anxiety.

Maxine was considering leaving the university due to a very painful relationship with an African American student (Dwayne) she had been dating. She had met Dwayne through the band four years before. Maxine was doubting her ability to be successful at the university due to the negative impact the relationship was having on her ability to focus and function as a student. "I don't want to mess school up. I want it to be a good experience and he was part of that. I dread coming back here and that's awful. I can't win for losin: I just feel stuck."

Maxine's sensitivity to and interest in issues related to diversity, particularly those dealing with African Americans, had surfaced in several of our conversations. She had mentioned "the diverse" students she met through the band and how that was a positive experience. Through her connections with the band, Maxine had secured the name of an African American man (Brandon) who would coach her in boxing. She wanted to learn boxing as a means to "get in shape." As it turns out, Brandon was the Director of a non-profit organization called the Sports Center where after school and summer programs are conducted for primarily African American children and youth living in a neighboring housing project. Brandon recruited Maxine to first volunteer her time and then hired her to work with the children. Maxine had also commented on her athletic training practicum where her supervisor talked about the importance of knowing and understanding the

African American experience in order to successfully work with the athletes. And, Maxine had mentioned how much fun it was to get to know the football players and those she mentioned specifically were African American.

Underlying her interest in and understanding of the African American experience is Maxine's friendship with and love for Dwayne. She has known Dwayne for four years and has been "dating" him for two years. "He's younger than me. We're best friends and he's great. I love him. He's immature and that's his problem – guys get so scared of the whole relationship thing. He talks about marriage but what's in between?!" According to Maxine, Dwayne does not feel as though he has enough time for her and yet he does not want her to go away and continues to call her, wanting them to get together. Maxine is confused and hurt by the conflicting messages. She told him, "If it takes me going away, I'll do that. You have to figure out yourself before you can deal with us. I'm not asking for a ring. I'm asking for a normal relationship."

It has been difficult for Maxine and Dwayne to have a "normal" relationship due to the bi-racial and cultural issues confronting both of them. Maxine feels close to Dwayne's parents. "I'm always welcome in their home. They tell me I'm a part of their family. His mother and I go Christmas shopping together and we went to see Dwayne compete in Ohio. She paid for the whole trip!" Maxine's family, however, is not as open to their relationship. "I don't say much to my family about Dwayne because he's black. There's always tension when my boyfriend comes home. They'll talk to him, but..."

Maxine is also uneasy when Dwayne travels to her home. "When he came up here one day, I told him not to go off the road. If he got lost, he should call me!" Maxine's sense is that around her home, "black people are ok if they are good athletes."

Otherwise, there is little acceptance of minorities in the local community. Maxine's response to such racism is, "If I'm the only white person, I don't think about race anymore. You can't see your own face, you know." She feels as though she "deals with the whole bi-racial thing better the he (Dwayne) does."

As Maxine struggled with the hurt and frustration involved in the relationship, she also struggled with the decision to return for the fall semester and the implications of how leaving would impact her graduation and completion of degree requirements. "If I drop courses it would put me another semester behind. I don't want to spend this year in misery. I want to finish but I want to enjoy it too." Maxine summarized her feelings as follows, "He was a little part of everything I did and he has taken it all away. He jerked the carpet out from under me and I have to regroup and put myself back together. I don't know what to do. I don't have a clue."

Maxine needed some help as she wrestled with the decision to return to school or take some time off. She visited her cousins in Chattanooga who are sympathetic to her problems and found solace and understanding. Maxine came back and told me, "You get to the point where you get tired. I want to finish up and maybe do an internship or travel. I'm at a point where I want to focus and get it done – my degree." She had decided not to live on campus or in Knoxville and had arranged to live with a friend at home who had an extra room in her house.

Maxine had also decided that she did not want to continue in a major, which required the physical sciences. She worked with an advisor to construct a plan where she could finish her degree in Psychology and perhaps move into a career or graduate program which focuses on diversity issues in an urban setting. Maxine is left wondering

how she will integrate her experiences, a Psychology major and a career. She

reflected back on a conversation she had with the mother of an African American child

who told her, "You've really missed your calling in life 'cause these kids love you."

The themes that emerged from Maxine's narrative were:

Connecting – Band

Learning – Being prepared

Diversity – Black/White

Commitment – Boyfriend

Major/Career Decision – Finishing up

Home – Family

Sarah:
"Exploring opened my mind" – A traveler

The drive through the upper East Tennessee countryside to Piney Creek Chapel

Road was beautiful. Piney Creek Church was just off of the narrow two-lane road and on

the right was Sarah's home overlooking the farms, valleys and ridges. Sarah had a

summer job at the local automotive parts plant working the graveyard shift. I offered to

drive to her home for the interview so she could get her needed sleep before reporting to

work later that evening. Sarah's father died when she was seven and her older sister

moved out when Sarah was just five years old so for a number of years it had just been

"me and Momma" at home. Although Sarah and her mother have lived alone, other

extended family have been very close. "All my family lives right down the road."

Sarah's brown eyes twinkle when she tells stories about her childhood play spent with two cousins who are the same age: "We were never kids to sit in front of the TV all day, but we were more than likely to be in that room back there playing Barbies…or we were stealing her brother's cars and taking them over to the barn and making little roads in the dirt. And, he'd come over there and fuss at us because he was afraid that we'd leave them and let the horses stomp 'em. And we were riding the horses, or we were playing in the creek, or we were up there in the little patch of woods. We were always doing something." As Sarah tells about her family on both her father and mother's side, she says, "It's a pretty good family!"

Sarah had never intended to enroll at a big university. She considered other regional state universities and several private colleges but did not feel like she "fit in." The private schools were "too prep." "I'm a jeans and sweatshirt kind of person. Maybe I'll put on a jacket or some make-up, but probably not!" Sarah's mother wanted her to consider a closer, less expensive regional university because she could have lived with her cousin and saved money. But, after visiting the university, "Sarah knew that was where I wanted to go." Her decision to attend the university was made easier for several reasons: "my best friend was going, it has all those different things you could major in – other schools do not," and her "family really didn't care where I went as long as I went." By combining savings from summer work, a work study grant, and other forms of financial aid, Sarah was able to scrape together the funds to attend the university. "I made the decision based on what was right for me. I didn't want to do what everyone else was doing."

Sarah started out in the College of Engineering but quickly changed to the "undecided" category. She loved elements of calculus. "I picked up on that so fast…so I thought maybe I'd try Engineering…NO, too MUCH math!" She then told how she moved through the English major, "but there isn't really all that much you can do with English, you know?" Sarah "loved chemistry." "But I didn't like the lab work which is what you would be doing if you went into Chemistry and I don't want to teach." Another area Sarah explored was pharmacy but decided, "nah, I'm not a doctor type, it just wasn't enough people stuff."

What helped Sarah decide on a particular major were her work experiences involving waiting tables and employment as a student manager in one of the campus cafeterias. "I've waitressed and that was fun. I miss it so much. I'm a student manager at a campus cafeteria and I found I liked being in charge. The people over me like me, they trust me 'cause I tend to get the job done. I'm hoping they'll teach me some more stuff, 'cause I think that's more than likely what I'm gonna go into, is Hotel and Restaurant Management. It's more specialized like Engineering where you are almost guaranteed a job anywhere you live."

Reflecting back on her journey to a major, Sarah feels that being undecided was "a benefit 'cause I've been interested in a lot of subjects and I've tried to take classes in most of them. So, I tried to get experience and that kind of opened my mind." Embedded in her story of finding a major is sound advice for all students, "Being undecided is more fun because you don't have to take all the classes in order; you have choices. You take classes that interest you…those might lead to your major. Don't go after the stuff you're good at necessarily. Go for the stuff that interests you. I felt that if

I was gonna major in something, I needed to like all the classes, or at least the majority. That's not always the case but that doesn't mean that you're not meant for that major. But my number one advice is to relax and not worry about it."

Sarah's part time work experiences were key to her decision about her major and career and helped her focus. But at the same time, Sarah enjoyed her varied learning experiences and several times exclaimed, "I love learning." She told stories about her experiences in Chemistry and English and would like to take more courses in those disciplines but is worried about "wasting time." "I was thinking about taking the big organic, but I thought I was gonna waste a lot of time 'cause I'm not going into Chemistry and I'm just taking it 'cause I wanna take it. There's a lot of stuff I want to take. Every English course I could take, I'd take it in a heartbeat – just for the sake of taking it. I love school. I always have."

Key to Sarah's learning is how the instructors make connections and relate the learning to "everyday stuff." She was motivated to take two chemistry courses because she had a teacher who would always answer questions and who used "models" to demonstrate the theories and concepts. This particular professor also used laboratory courses to connect chemistry to the real world. "That semester we made aspirin. We made alcohol. We took the caffeine out of tea. That was the best lab. It was more everyday stuff." Sarah describes her English literature professor as "young, told funny stories and made even the boring stuff interesting. He made you think about the connections." Her Western Civilization instructor was "hard" and had "a dry sense of humor. His essay tests were hard but we never missed a lecture and that class was an

evening class and on "the hill." She especially enjoyed her Spanish classes because they were small and the instructors "recognized you" and "knew your name."

Sarah is "kinda intimidated to talk with professors" but finds the TA's very approachable and appreciates the time they take to get to know the students and answer questions. She has found the TA's to be "more laid back than professors; they have classes too, they understand. It's easier to talk to TA's 'cause they're students too. Professors don't learn your names, but TA's do, they know where your problems are because they see you more often." Sarah admits that she is still "nervous" about meeting professors and that they will always "surprise you." "If you don't make a good impression on the professor, you're up the creek without a paddle!" She is looking forward to her smaller upper division major courses because "you can really get to know the teachers."

Sarah wants to have a "reason for learning stuff so I can put it into simple words." She explains that she "learns from her mistakes" and that is why it is important for her to be actively engaged in her learning. Sarah summarizes her thoughts on learning by stating that "most of my classes opened my mind. College makes you look at things a whole lot different."

Beginning with her freshman year at the university, Sarah lived on campus and states "that is what I like about the university. I love living in the dorms, 'cause everybody is there – you meet all sorts of people." Sarah only returns home to work in the summer and for some of the semester breaks. Living on campus gives Sarah "freedom" and the opportunity to "be out on [her] own." Sarah first lived in one of the traditional residence halls in a suite arrangement with her best friend from home, Beth,

and another young woman from North Carolina. After their freshman year, the three moved to the apartment residence hall. "Living in the apartment residence hall is a whole different ball game – never had so much freedom!" Sarah has shared the majority of her university experiences with these two women, both in the academic and non-academic areas. She feels they have influenced her more than any other persons at the university. "I don't ever see being without Jane, she's my best friend in the whole wide world."

Ashley, the woman from NC, is "the first person we (Beth and Sarah) have known who has money." Ashley has provided Sarah with several "first time" opportunities such as attending a debutante ball, flying in both private and commercial airplanes, and traveling to Charleston and the Bahamas for vacations. Sarah had never been out of East Tennessee before and the experiences traveling have influenced her plans for her future. "I am wanting to travel – to move away."

Sarah has established her independence not only by living away from home most of the year but by breaking up with her high school fiancé. She tried to encourage him to attend the university "cause school's fun and I wanted him to have that fun too and I also wanted him down here with me. But it was hard to be here and him up there. It kind of kept me from making a lot of friends, because I didn't go out." Sarah told the story about how the previous summer he had started spending more time with his friends whom she did not like and who, in turn, did not like her. "He got a job in a parts plant and decided that was plenty for him to do and here I am wanting to travel, wanting to move away. Coming to college opened everything up. He was really kind of holding me back, not intentionally but just because I felt committed to him." After Sarah returned to school, she started dating a guy she met through her work in the university cafeteria and has been

dating him for about a year. They live in the same apartment residence hall. "We work together and it was one of those 'hit it off' things."

To Sarah, being independent means not being afraid to seek out new experiences and she credits going to the university as providing her the opportunity to do that. "Since going to college, I've been able and willing to do a lot more stuff – not necessarily take chances – but like flying. When I was living at home I never would have got on a plane. I was terrified of crashing or terrorists or something like that." Sarah also sees becoming independent as her mind "opening up." She describes her cafeteria work as "being in a mini Arab nation" because of the many international students who work in the cafeteria. "You really have to admire them because they come over here and they rarely speak English. I see it as a new experience for me."

Sarah expressed frustration with the very conservative beliefs of her family and friends at home. "I come back up here and everybody's like…these Arabs, what do they think they're doing? Or, they are telling Polish jokes or being critical of Catholics. And I'm thinking, 'Broaden your horizons!' The people here are more ignorant about stuff like that and I don't like ignorance!" Sarah laughs about the irony of her dating situation because her new boyfriend is Catholic and from New Jersey!

Sarah claims that her need for independence is a "family trait" and that her mother and older sister are "real independent," as was her father. "We all just hate having to answer to somebody." Sarah "likes showing her independence because I think it makes people trust you more. It shows them you know what you're doing. You know what you can do. I can handle myself in the outside world."

Reflecting on her narrative and the stories she told about her university experience, Sarah summarized by saying, "Coming to college helps you to mature. You find out more about yourself and you're out on your own. You are your own person – the experience helps you grow. It just helps you grow as a person. It's always helped me!"

The themes that emerged from Sarah's narrative were:

Finding a major – Exploring/discovering

Learning – Opened up my mind

Shared experiences – Relationships

Independence – Growth/change

Home – Family

The themes revealed in each student's story are like "stars that make up the universe of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes" (Van Manen, p. 90). The student's stories give us a vivid picture of their experiences and an understanding of how they make sense and meaning of their lives. The larger stories meshed with their individual stories thus providing a connection between their homes and the university. It is also evident that across stories, the eight students clearly reveal common themes. In Chapter 5, I will explore these common themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEMES COMMON TO THE STUDENTS' NARRATIVES

As we thus study lived experience descriptions and
discover the themes that begin to emerge, then we may note
that certain experiential themes recur as commonality or
possible commonalities in the various descriptions gathered.
The task is to hold on to these themes by lifting appropriate phrases
or by capturing in singular statements the main thrust of the
meaning of the themes.
(Van Manen, 1990, p. 93)

Part One: Analysis of Narrative

Over time, as I repeatedly read and analyzed the narratives of the eight students, it

became clear that there were common themes across the stories. These themes suggest

shared stories embedded in the larger story of the students' experiences. There is

evidence of each shared theme in the individual narratives but the "similar themes are

nuanced differently" (Kramp, 1995, p. 68). "Contextualized and personalized, they

describe the particularities" of the each student's experience of being a student (p. 68).

Kramp describes each common theme as a "continuum of experience" (p. 68). In the

case of the student participants in this study, certain themes are shared across the

students' stories. Within each theme, the shared meanings underlying that particular

theme are revealed.

The analysis of narratives was an inductive process that moved from the students'

stories to common story elements and themes. I developed these themes from the data

and explored relationships, connections and commonalities among them. Van Manen

(1990) describes such themes using the metaphor of a web: "they are more like knots in

the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus

lived through as meaningful wholes" (p. 90). The themes will serve to hint at the

experience of the students in the university culture and how they connect with their home

culture. The telling of their stories became the means by which they reflected on their

lived experience and thus provided the opportunity to reflectively analyze the thematic

aspect of that experience (Van Maanen, 1988). The common story elements and themes

not only reflect the students' particular experiences as told in their stories but also serve

as the "knots" in their individual stories of experience – tying or relating one to another.

In the following sections, I discuss each common story element and theme along

with the "nuances that individualize them" as represented in selected excerpts from the

students' narratives. The order of themes is as listed below and the representation of the

students follows the order written in the previous chapter. Common themes arose in the

story elements of:

<div align="center">

Home – Family

Connecting – Relationships

Learning – Hands-on

Major Decision

Self Identity

</div>

Theme 1: Home – Family

Throughout the data analysis, it was evident that Home and Family exerted a

powerful influence on the decisions and actions of the student participants. Most of their

decisions and actions were taken with or made with their allegiance to home and family

values or relationships foremost in their minds. At different points in their college years,

the influence of home and family had greater or sometimes lesser impact. In every case, however, the students continued to consider Home and Family as they renegotiated their connections to fit new learning, different experiences and changing relationships. This theme includes the following motifs:

- From the students' perspective, "home" involved a sense of place and a sense of family or kin relationships. For some students, one was stronger than the other, but both were present to some degree in all stories.

- Each student exhibited a strong sense of responsibility and commitment to their home and family.

- The students were proud of their families and took pride in the notion that they exhibited various family "traits" in their own identities.

- At various points in their stories, the students disconnected and reconnected with their homes and families and went through a process of renegotiating relationships with them based on their new learning and experiences.

A shared motif or element within this theme is the different meanings the students gave to their own sense of home. For several of the students, home was more than the family. It included the farm, the surrounding countryside and community. For other students, the home, as place, was background to the relationships with immediate family members and their extended families. All students shared the intensity of the connections with home and family in their daily university lives.

Frustrations related to home and family were implicit in their experiences and manifested themselves differently and at different times in the students' stories.

Underlying the frustration was the need to restory their connections with home to accommodate the personal growth and changes occurring in their own stories and the desire to share these changes with family, especially parents. Especially disconcerting to the students were those times when the parents did not ask about their collegiate experiences. For the most part, the students were insightful and realized that their parents did not know what to ask. At this point in their stories, it took a special effort on the students' part to reach out to their families and reconnect in new ways.

A common thread running through all stories was the students' sense of responsibility for and commitment to their family along with a certain pride relative to family traits they valued. If the students were needed at home, that need took priority over school or outside work. The sense was that school and work would in some way be addressed but the family's need was what came first. Along with commitment came a sense of pride when discussing certain family traits like independence, being proud, hard-working, and stubborn. The students saw these traits in themselves and included them as part of their narrative of identity.

Abby describes her family as her "closest social network" and believes that they are "gonna accept me no matter what." Most compelling is how Abby describes her experience of moving back home after living on campus. "I think I've learned the most by moving back home. I'm the kind of person who has to feel comfortable in a setting to do other work, I mean to explore things. I guess by moving back home, I felt safe enough to explore things more and to be more outgoing." Reflecting on her interview, Abby said, "I didn't realize how proud I am of my family." Being close to her family and

feeling "safe" within her family network provided the support Abby needed to more fully experience being a university student.

As Alice talked about her decision to attend the university and live at home, she exclaimed, "There is no way I could ever leave my father; he needs my help on the farm." To Alice, home and family means farm and father. Alice admits that it gets "hectic" balancing her school and home responsibilities and there seems to be a growing conflict with her father over her role as "housemaker" versus "tomboy." It is obvious, however, that her love for the farm and knowing the land are shaping her ideas of self and her future. "Since I grew up on a farm, I want to share the outdoors with people. And, just teach them what I know about farming."

Beth describes herself as being a "contradiction, both independent and dependent." Living at home with her family actually gives Beth a feeling of independence. "Here (home) I can do my own thing. I have my own space. When I lived at the university, I felt I was in a hole, there was not a safety net there." Beth's safety net consists of her family, friends (especially a long-term relationship with a high school boyfriend) and her church. She describes this network as "the people I'm close to." Beth brings to her learning at the university her values from home. She has especially enjoyed her religious studies classes "because religion is something that is so universal. Everybody at least thinks about it." Beth has also taken advantage of courses that emphasize the Appalachian region and culture and has developed a deeper appreciation of her own family history.

Leaving the university for a semester to help during a crisis on the family farm was a "turning point" for Jay in his college career as well as in his relationship with his

parents. Jay had suffered conflict and self-doubt when Home and Family did not mesh with his desire for a university education. Jay's parents (especially his father) thought it was a "big mistake" for him to attend the university. "They definitely knew I didn't want to be on the farm and they didn't think I had what it took to finish college. And, that was part of the reason I kept driving to finally get out...to prove them wrong." Jay credits growing up on a farm as "teaching him responsibility, respect for people around me and hard work. That is a part of life and that's the mindset you need for college." It became clear while listening to Jay's stories about home and family that his sense of personal history gave him a growing sense of self.

When asked about his family, Lee enthusiastically responded, "My family is great...I love them!" Lee's stories of home and family focused on sibling relationships, hard working, supportive parents and his experience of being the "small town jock." His family taught him that "if you don't stand up for yourself, you lose pride, you lose dignity." "Knowing people" and "making connections" is a value reinforced for Lee in the larger story of his hometown. "I think it all goes back to coming from a small town, just knowing people and stuff."

Lindsey, Maxine and Sarah all share a sense of family as more prominent than the physical home or place. References are made in their stories to their homes but the emphasis is placed on their relationships with family members. All three of these students lived on campus and told how they enjoyed being "away from home," even though they still valued their families.

Lindsey feels especially close to and responsible for her four younger siblings. "I thought about going away (to college) but I have four younger brothers and sisters I'm

close to and I don't want to leave them." Lindsey lived at her rural home the first year and a half of college and commuted to the university. Lindsey's parents reacted positively to her request to move on campus and responded by saying, "If that's what you want to do, that's what we'll do." Lindsey misses her family but feels strongly that it was a good decision to move on campus. "It's so good to get away from them. It makes it so much easier to do the things that I need to do." Even though she is no longer at living at home, Lindsey's ties are strong with her family in a number of ways. She talks with her mother every day and refers to the "mother/daughter" bond they have together. Lindsey's concern for her younger siblings brings her home "at least once a week" to visit or take them on an outing. Her visits home are also an opportunity to check on her father who is "quite ill." Lindsey's sense of family and home clearly focuses on the strong relationship she has with her immediate family members.

Home to Maxine is fairly "chaotic" with everyone "bouncing around." Her elderly great aunt and uncle live with her mother, stepfather and younger brother and sister, which "pretty much fills up the house." When Maxine goes home she lives out of her "duffel bag and a collection of boxes" and often shares a bed with one of her younger siblings. Maxine's world has changed dramatically since she became involved with Dwayne and the issues surrounding bi-racial dating have put distance between her and some family members. However, when Maxine most needed comfort and advice concerning Dwayne, she turned to her family members (cousins) in Chattanooga. Maxine still feels close to her mother and had a "talk" with her about taking time to ask about her life and school. She also feels a responsibility for her younger siblings in terms of helping them see beyond the "race issue."

When Sarah talked about home, she referred to it as "up here" and the university was "down there." She is ready to "travel and move away" from "up here." Sarah returns home in the summers to work, which finances her college degree and eventually a future away from home. She expressed frustration with the conservative beliefs of her family and friends at home. "I come back up here and everybody's like...these Arabs, what do they think they're doing? Or, they are telling Polish jokes or being critical of Catholics. And I'm thinking, 'Broaden your horizons!' The people here are more ignorant about stuff like that and I don't like ignorance!" So, although Sarah sees herself as "growing" in a different way, she attributes her independent streak to her family: "It is a family trait. We all just hate having to answer to somebody!" It is apparent that Sarah sees herself not only moving away from home but also changing in ways that distance her from family and friends. But in other ways, Sarah's identity is closely tied to those family traits she admires, especially independence.

Figure 5-1 represents Theme 1 as it emerges in each student's narrative. As each theme is discussed, the matrix displays the particularities of that theme for each student. As Kramp (1995) in her study of teachers' narratives of student learning experiences, developed a similar "relational matrix" to represent the teachers' narratives and resulting thematic analysis, the following developing matrix represents the students' narratives and the "nuances" in each common theme. A vertical reading first displays the central implied metaphor and captures the sense of the individual student's identity as expressed by the student in his/her story and then, the particularities of each common theme within that story. A horizontal reading results in a display of the common theme and how it is "nuanced" in each student's story. After the final common theme is discussed (Theme 5),

Relational Matrix	Abby	Alice	Beth	Jay	Lee	Lindsey	Maxine	Sarah
Metaphors *Themes*	"Figure out a path"- A pathfinder	"Finding the right spot"- A settler	"It's what you make of it"- An artist	"An adventure"- An adventurer	"Making connec-tions"- A politician	"I don't walk with my head down"- A proud recruit	"I don't have a clue"- A detective	"Exploring opened my mind"- A traveler
Home/ Family	Support-Social Network	Farm Responsi-bilities and commit-ment to Father	Relation-Ships with Family, Friends and Church	Parents and Farm - A sense of self	Pride and small town connections	Responsi-bility for and close-ness to family	Responsi-bility for family members and support	Pride and Identity

Figure 5-1

A RELATIONAL MATRIX OF IMPLIED METAPHORS AND THEMES (THEME 1)

a completed matrix displaying the common themes and how these themes are nuanced in each individual student narrative is presented.

Theme 2: Connecting — Relationships

While considering the common theme of Connecting-Relationships, it appeared that the students were adjusting themselves to accommodate a new setting, new characters and perhaps ultimately a new plot line. Kenyon and Randal (1997) suggest that "we are continually having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives" (p. 160). These students came from a home-culture that emphasized close ties (connections) to family, kin and their surrounding communities. It became evident that they came to the university looking for connections and expecting to find relationships with faculty, new friends and the environment. Their level of comfort at the university and academic success appeared to depend on how easily they made connections and formed relationships. The shared motifs within this theme are:

- Seeking connections with the new learning environment and professors.

- Seeking relationships with new friends.

- Renegotiating relationships and connections with Home and Family

- Encountering obstacles when connections did not happen or when new relationships were difficult to form.

- Connecting through relationships is a continuous process that connects the Home-Family and University cultures.

As I listened to their stories, it became evident that they came to the university looking for connections and expecting to find relationships with new friends and their teachers. Their level of comfort at the university and academic success appeared to depend on how easily they connected with new friends, teachers and the environment. Stories of obstacles emerged when the students encountered difficulties creating their new connections and frustrations were expressed when there was a lack of connection.

Obstacles were not only present in the university environment but also emerged in the students' relationships with family and friends at home, requiring a restorying or renegotiation of that connection. How they engaged in that process of change was often a renegotiation or rethinking of how they connected with others, with a new learning environment and with their past stories. "Story-wise," these students were thrown into "a whole different world" which required a rethinking of how to make meaning of that world and how to connect.

Working hard at making her life "work" is how Abby approaches her life and represents how she connects her various life experiences. Her need to work for financial

reasons was a major factor in her not connecting with the university during her first two years, even though she was living on campus. "Because I had a job and because I had to be there five days a week and on weekends, there wasn't a lot of time to do the extra-curricular things where I could meet new people and enjoy college." Abby made some important connections with instructors and professors who encouraged her in her academic work. She noted one of her social work professors as really caring about her and listening to "my ideas and thoughts." As mentioned previously, her move home was a positive step for Abby, but it also required "working" at reconnecting with her mother and re-negotiating their relationship on terms that met Abby's needs as a college student. Abby describes both her father and mother as "hard-working" and says she comes from a family tradition of "working hard to get what you want."

When asked to describe her university experience, Alice responded, "It's just an overwhelming experience 'cause it's just so many people. When you get here you don't know anyone." Because Alice's non-academic time is given to helping on the farm, her opportunity to connect with new friends and get to know people arises in her class time. She especially enjoyed a chemistry class in which "we had to do workshops and work together in groups." "There are three or four friends from there that I still talk to regularly." Alice enjoyed biology because she "got to know" her lab partner. She especially feels connected when instructors "know my name." As Alice described her difficulties with a large lecture class, she exclaimed, "You don't know anybody and it's like you're the only person in there." Alice is excited about taking more classes on the Agricultural campus and hopes she will "get to know" students who share her interest in and appreciation for farming.

Beth approaches her student experience similar to how one approaches a job. When people ask her about university athletics or campus life, Beth responds, "No college on weekends!" She sees her student experience as providing her with what she needs to complete her "plan," to earn her degree and then to teach. Connecting with the university in terms of campus life has not been important to her. "I've never felt a bond with the university." For Beth, connecting has been a process of integrating her new knowledge and changing ideas with how she relates to and with existing relationships at home. Those relationships represent connecting with family, friends and her church. Beth told stories about how living at home as a student has required several talks with her mother about "independence, responsibility" and needing a "private space to study." Beth says that she has "changed the way I look at relationships and life." In her own way, Beth has re-storied her connections with home and family through responsive yet independent relationships.

Jay used the metaphor of "adventure" to describe his university experience and implicit in that metaphor were a number of "obstacles" he had to "fight" through in order to succeed. As Jay talked about his student experience, he told stories of "struggling" with finances, overcoming his parent's "doubts" of his academic ability, being pulled back to the family farm, "failing" in his first major and having to "fight" his way back into the university. There were a number of times in his collegiate experience that Jay did not feel connected with the university or with home and family. By "persisting" in his struggle to find a major, resolve the family and farm crisis and gain readmission to the university, Jay was able to reconnect with home and family and the university. Also, through several mentoring relationships with a former elementary school teacher and

history professors, Jay was able to connect to a new, fulfilling major. He re-connected with his family and home through a recognition and acknowledgment of his own history and family identity. He connected with friends to ensure a "safety net" away from home. Jay's persistence "finally [said with big sigh] paid off" as he completed his degree and made plans for connecting with his future career of teaching.

From Lee's point of view, "making connections" is a skill he has brought with him from growing up in a "small town" and is central to his university experience. Connecting or "knowing people" is a common thread running through all of his stories, including home, athletics, academics, friends and even future jobs and careers. Because Lee struggles academically, the social realm of his experience is important to his sense of self-confidence. This is especially true since he has not been successful in collegiate-level athletics and no longer is "identified as an athlete." Lee originally "connected" with the university through the athletic program and is now in the process of re-connecting in new ways, separate from the student athlete identity. Although, as a student, Lee has always lived away from home, he connects with home often and most frequently through contacts with his mother: "I am closest to her in terms of my student life. She tells me to practice hard, keep up with my studies and to stick with it." Connecting with home is important to Lee but he also is "talking" with his mother about independent decision making and "being on his own." Ultimately, Lee works hard at making connections and believes that knowing the "right people" will help when "you're stuck in a situation." "You need people helping you out, someone able to pull some strings."

When asked to describe her experience of being a student at the university, Lindsey immediately began talking about her many friends, "meeting new people and

meeting her fiancé." At this point in her collegiate career, Lindsey has negotiated a strong connection with the university through a significant network of friends. Lindsey's connection to the university seems to have been made with the least amount of struggle, largely due to her "outgoing and friendly" nature. Her ability to easily meet people makes the university feel "like home." From Lindsey's perspective, her move on campus was "an opportunity to meet new friends," to spend more time with her fiancé and make life a "lot easier because I don't have to commute." Lindsey's connections with home and family remain strong and supportive. Even though her parents did not attend the university (or any college), they seem to readily accept Lindsey's need for a more independent life, even in light of her father's serious illness. Perhaps their long affiliation with the university's sports program and frequent trips to campus have contributed to their understanding of her experience. Reflecting on her friendships, Lindsey states, "I need a lot of friends, being a girl, I guess. I just need more people to talk to. I've met so many new friends here that are really, really good friends."

For the first several years at the university, Maxine's main connection to the campus was through her participation in the band. Within the larger community of the university, band served as a smaller community of friends where students shared similar interests, learned to work together in favorable and not-so-favorable situations and performed in a revered and honored university ensemble. "Band is really wonderful... You look up at everybody and think, I'm a part of this wonderful show!" Band was also the connection between Maxine, her boyfriend Dwayne and a larger African American community. In Maxine's case, the connection she made with Dwayne was far enough outside the boundaries of her family's values that it caused a significant strain to her

connection with them. Later, the breaking up of the connections to Dwayne has had an even greater impact upon her – to the extent that she is considering a total disconnect from the university. Maxine is clearly in the midst of re-storying many of the plots in her stories, of redefining many of her connections to home and to school. "He (Dwayne) was a little part of everything I did and he has taken it all away. He jerked the carpet out from under me and I have to try to regroup and put myself back together."

As I listened to Sarah's stories, I realized that she continuously used "we" as she described her experiences. When she talked about home, "we" most often referred to herself and her cousins or to her mother, and as she told stories about her university experience, "we" represented herself and her friends, Ashley and Beth. By sharing everything she does – whether it involves home, academics, work, or social life – with a close friend or family member, Sarah keeps herself connected to someone or something at all times. A major factor in her decision to attend the university was the fact that her best friend from home, Beth, had decided to go to the university. Sarah's East Tennessee world has opened up as she flew for the first time on planes (both private and commercial), visited Charleston and the Bahamas for vacations and even attended her friend's (Ashley's) debutante ball. She now sees all kinds of possibilities for connecting in new ways with the world around her. "I am wanting to travel – to move away." "Not being able to share the experience at the university" was a reason Sarah gave for breaking up with her high school fiancé. Sarah's new boyfriend works with her in one of the campus cafeterias and lives in the same residence hall. "We work together and it was just one of those hit it off things!" Sarah sees her university experience as helping her "grow and be out on your own." In her own way, she has found a balance between becoming a

Relational Matrix	Abby	Alice	Beth	Jay	Lee	Lindsey	Maxine	Sarah
Metaphors *Themes*	"Figure out a path": A pathfinder	"Finding the right spot": A settler	"It's what you make of it": An artist	"An adventure": An adventurer	"Making connec-tions": A politician	"I don't walk with my head down": A proud recruit	"I don't have a clue": A detective	"Exploring opened my mind": A traveler
Home/ Family	Support/ Social Network	Farm Responsi-bilities and Commit-ment to Father	Relation-ships with Family, Friends and Church	Parents and Farm - A sense of self	Pride and small town connections	Responsi-bility for and close-ness to family	Responsi-bility for family members and support	Pride and Identity
Connect-ing/ Relation-ships	Working at connecting with family, school and work	Knowing people and people knowing Alice	Growing and changing through relation-ships and their connections	Connecting through persisting and relation-ships with mentors	Meeting people and making helpful connections	Connecting to experiences through friends	Connecting to experiences through belonging	Sharing experiences with old and new friends

Figure 5-2

A RELATIONAL MATRIX OF IMPLIED METAPHORS AND THEMES (THEMES 1 AND 2)

more independent person while at the same time sharing her new experiences with old

and new friends.

Theme 3: Learning – Hands-on

As the eight students told stories about their experiences of learning at the

university, it was clear that learning held many different meanings from the very specific

"hands-on" and "putting it into simple words" to "learning about life" and "opening my

eyes and mind." Their stories show that when these students were able to relate learning

to some aspect of their lives, they became actively engaged in their learning. Those

courses that engaged the students in being active creators and composing their own

stories were the experiences most noted by the students as being successful and

meaningful. Implicit in the shared story element of these students' distinctive methods of learning are elements that focus upon:

- Learning about one's self.

- Learning about others who are different and appreciating those differences.

- Relating learning to the real world.

- Learning best when there was a personal connection with the instructor and when the students sensed the instructor was interested in their success or "cared."

The students in this study learned best when actively engaged in their learning and when they were able to relate the learning to some aspect of their lives and thus became actively engaged in the learning process. The classes that focused more on the transmission of knowledge and put the students in the roles of being passive receivers were the most difficult for these students. Those courses that engaged them as active creators and composing their own stories were the experiences most noted by these students as being successful and meaningful. How the students succeeded or failed in a course most often depended on how the particular course fit with this hands-on learning style. Also present is the desire in the students to take what they learn and directly apply it to some aspect of their lives – most often relating to a specific major or career goal.

Another motif within this common story element includes not only learning what the students gained from their courses but learning about themselves and about others who are different and appreciating those differences. Again, learning about themselves and others was seen as helpful - knowledge and understanding they could use in their

daily lives. An appreciation of differences was also viewed as learning that in some ways set them apart from family and friends at home and created some distance because of the conflict in values.

According to the students, learning was greatly facilitated when there was a personal connection with the instructor or professor and when the students sensed that the teacher cared about them and was interested in their success. These students came to the university expecting to connect and to form relationships with their instructors. When those connections could not be made, the students felt isolated and detached from the learning experience. As a result of this disconnect, the students were not always academically successful in these particular courses.

Abby claims that the "hardest part for me, but the best, most helpful, was to learn about me. To learn about myself and what makes me react the way I do." Acquiring assertive communication skills has enabled Abby to effectively work with clients, work through conflicts with family members and speak assertively for issues she feels are important. "I guess I've always had my opinions, but I never really expressed them. Before, I had never stood up for anybody." Abby likes to "solve problems and figure things out." She enjoys professors who challenge her and who make her think about "why this happens or why that happens." Abby believes it is important for teachers to listen to students, to take time to talk with students and to acknowledge "when we do something good." According to Abby, "true learning" takes place when she is "doing it." She "keeps learning from her experiences and just keeps growing."

For Alice, teachers relating to students, students relating to teachers and subject matter relating to "real life" are all important to the learning process. Alice's style of

learning works best in "hands-on" situations. "When I get in the lab, it sinks in,
'cause I can do it." Significantly, "hands on" is how Alice has learned the many
complicated tasks involved in keeping the farm running. Perhaps, not surprisingly, she
found learning most difficult in the large lecture classes in chemistry and physics. "We'd
go into lecture and it would all bounce off of me. You feel like you don't know anybody
and you're the only person in there, like you have your own little world in that big class."
Learning was "fun" for Alice when the instructors were helpful, knew her name and
could relate to her in some way. "I guess the big classes mostly made me feel like I was
just a number and not a real person."

In contrast, large classes did not frustrate Beth, but she learned more in classes in
which the professors took an interest in the students. She appreciates professors who take
"time to listen, are available and want to help students." As Beth is learning new material,
she wants it "to make sense. I can't just accept something. I have to make sure I really
understand it. I want to know why." Learning about people and "getting a glimpse of
what other people think" have been the focus of several of Beth's religious studies and
Appalachian studies courses. In learning about others, she says she has learned "more
about myself." She wants her learning to be relevant and "to know" things "that will help
me," especially related to her future career as a teacher.

For Jay, academic success was possible only when the kinds of thinking skills
required in a particular course of study meshed with the "mindset" that he brought with
him from his upbringing. He discovered that his strength had always been in "gathering
information and figuring it out," and that he had developed a love for history throughout
his life. For his first two years at the university, Jay struggled with trying to learn the

engineering curriculum. "I simply could not get it. I could not figure out what they were doing." Key to Jay's academic recovery was a change in major to an area he "really enjoyed – history." His approach to learning is "to understand, to get the proper mindset, to pick up the most important concepts and issues and to get my head in gear." Research comes "real natural" to Jay. The highpoint of his college career was receiving an "A" on a research paper with the comment from the history professor that it "was one of the best he had read." The "college mind set" and a major he connected with were what Jay needed to be a successful learner.

Underlying Lee's learning experiences has been his learning disability – dyslexia. He admitted "I probably made it through high school because I played sports." Connecting with teachers and establishing one-on-one relationships have been a strategy for Lee to get the extra attention and help he needed to be a successful learner. This has proven to be difficult at the university. Lee could only name three professors whom he felt wanted to "get to know me – cared about me." In fact, he claimed, "I think they all hated me!" In order to gain some ground early in his courses, Lee would often raise his hand and ask questions because he knew that "once we got into the readings I'm not going to be able to keep up as much." He thinks that compensating for his disability in this manner really "bothered some of them (instructors)." Lee feels strongly that the best way to learn is to "experience it" and "do it." He enjoys learning when the professors "know" him and "know" his name. Lee is most excited about learning when it is "interactive." "Everything should be interactive. You learn by experience too – not just books."

Unlike several of the students in this study, Lindsey described her experience with instructors as "personal" and she always felt as though she could approach them with questions after class or give them a call. Lindsey appreciated the fact that the instructors expected students to be responsible learners. "They realize that we were paying for this and it was our decision if we wanted to learn or not. They are giving you the independence to come to class or not." Although Lindsey wants a major that "relates to life," she appreciates those learning experiences which "have opened [her] eyes" and have given her the "courage" to think independently. Her philosophy and sociology courses particularly "made me not afraid to make up [her] own mind." She learned in those courses how different people "believe different things about the same ideas." The larger lecture classes in biology and chemistry proved to be difficult for Lindsey and she attributes some of the difficulty to the fact that these course did not "relate to real life – all this stuff I'll never need to know."

"Being prepared" is how Maxine approaches her learning experiences. She wants to "be ready for the challenge and focus on getting the job done." When Maxine does not feel prepared in a learning situation, she panics and reacts with fear. This was the case in chemistry and physics. Maxine's reaction was one of fear: "it really scared me. When I got scared, I couldn't soak anything in." Maxine withdrew from both of these courses and eventually changed her major to avoid these physical sciences. She especially enjoys learning from professors and instructors who are "nice" and who "listen to you." The courses in her Exercise Science major that emphasize applying her knowledge are challenging to and engaging for Maxine. "I really enjoyed the class because we got to do

a practicum. She would let us do stuff like thinking of exercises to help the kids stretch or work on problem areas."

Sarah learns best when the instructors "make connections" and relate material to "everyday stuff." She took courses in a number of different areas and enjoyed the varied learning experiences. "I've been interested in a lot of subjects and I've tried to take classes in most of them." When talking about learning, Sarah responds enthusiastically, "I love learning!" She specifically mentioned a chemistry professor whose labs consisted of making everyday substances like aspirin and alcohol and an English instructor who "made you think about the connections." Sarah appreciated the role the graduate teaching associates play in terms of being "approachable, taking time to get to know you and answering questions." Her sense was that the professors were distant from the actual student experience while the TA's were "more laid back." "They have classes too, they understand." Sarah is looking forward to her upper division classes in her major because they will be smaller and "you can really get to know the teachers." Sarah reflected on her experience of learning as "opening my mind." "College makes you look at things a whole lot different."

Theme 4: Major Decision

As the eight students struggled with their "major decision," it was evident that the influence of home and family, their need for connecting and relationships, and their hands-on learning style played a significant role in affecting how the students pulled away from certain majors and gravitated towards others. The students were engaged in

Relational Matrix	Abby	Alice	Beth	Jay	Lee	Lindsey	Maxine	Sarah
Metaphors *Themes*	"Figure out a path": A pathfinder	"Finding the right spot": A settler	"It's what you make of it": An artist	"An adventure": An adventurer	"Making connections": A politician	"I don't walk with my head down": A proud recruit	"I don't have a clue": A detective	"Exploring opened my mind": A traveler
Home/ Family	Support/ Social Network	Farm Responsibilities and Commitment to Father	Relationships with Family, Friends and Church	Parents and Farm – A sense of self	Pride and small town connections	Responsibility for and closeness to family	Responsibility for family members and support	Pride and Identity
Connecting/ Relationships	Working at connecting with family, school and work	Knowing people and people knowing Alice	Growing and changing through relationships and their connections	Connecting through persistence and relationships with mentors	Meeting people and making helpful connections	Connecting to experiences through friends	Connecting to experiences through belonging	Sharing experiences with old and new friends
Learning – Hands-on	About self	Relative to the real world	To understand, to know	Through research and persistence	Through experience and connections	Making up my own mind – relative to my life	By doing it	Opened my mind

Figure 5-3

A RELATIONAL MATRIX OF IMPLIED METAPHORS AND THEMES (THEMES 1, 2 AND 3)

some major changes in their stories. They not only had choices to make about changing events and direction; they were also struggling with how to make sense of a plot when the elements no longer seemed to fit.

Underlying the common theme of Major Decision are the following motifs:

- The students expressed relief when their major decision was made.

- The students felt connected to a specific discipline and embraced the sense of what it meant to have a distinct academic home.

- The decision to major in a specific major was based on what felt right or what really interested the student. The decisions were not made based on getting ahead or making money.

- All of the students ultimately chose majors that avoided the sciences.

- Outside influences and experiences (home, part-time work, former teachers, and volunteer work) impacted the students' final major decision.

The students were engaged in some major changes in their stories. They not only had choices to make about changing events and direction, they were also struggling with how to make sense of a plot when the elements no longer seemed to fit. The students worked at "figuring it out," "finding the right spot," "following my plan," "finding something" or "exploring." As Kenyon and Randall (1997) summarize it, "an inability to fit events together in an order that at least seems to make sense, to make narrative connection, is a radical incompetence at being human. As this feeling of disconnectedness builds, our frustrations rise – until we do what we must to 'get it together'" (p. 103).

Somewhat surprising was the fact that the students' decisions were not based on getting ahead or making money but were based on what "felt right" to them, on what interested them most and on the influence of certain instructors and professors. Unfortunately, for 6 of the 8 students, the push away from a major occurred as the result of not successfully completing the science pre-requisite and co-requisite courses. Ultimately, the move towards a certain major was grounded in experiences they had or influences they encountered outside of the formal classroom – summer work at home, work on the farm, conversations with a high school teacher and family friend, volunteer

work, caring for younger siblings and extra-curricular activities. At this important point in their university experience, the influence of family and home and the continued connections were apparent in their decisions. Also in the shared story element of making the "major" decision is the sense of great relief the students expressed when telling the story of actually making the decision to major in a certain discipline. It seemed at that specific point, the students felt connected to the university in a new way and embraced the sense of what it meant to be a part of the chosen major – to have a distinct academic home or place.

Abby began her career at the university as a pre-medical student but after her freshman year decided it was not her "cup of tea." As Abby thought about a different major, she spent time clarifying what she really enjoyed doing and what was important to her. "I like to put things together – to problem solve and think. I like to be challenged and to see how people change." Abby volunteered to do work in a local social services agency to "get some kind of clue" what the field was about. The work clicked with Abby as did the related coursework. She feels that Social Work will allow her work with people in ways she values. Finally deciding on her major "helped a lot." "I think once I had some knowledge of what I wanted to do in college, not bouncing around from one major to another, and kind of getting a peer network – it helped a lot. So, once I got here (the university) and did what I needed to do…figure out a path that I was taking through college, I wasn't so scared anymore."

At one point during our first interview, Alice gave a big sigh and said, "I finally decided what I want to do the rest of my life." She was very relieved to find an "academic home" where her love for agriculture and her "hands-on" learning style was

compatible with the curriculum and learning experiences. Alice had been on quite a "major" journey as she moved through Biology, Botany and Secondary Education. She had hit a stumbling block in terms of passing the co-requisite courses in the physical sciences for those particular majors. She was resourceful and explored different Web pages which presented majors and careers in the College of Agriculture, talked with academic advisors and took an introductory course in Agriculture. "I've always wanted to do something where I can be outside most of the time. I want to share the outdoors with people and teach them what I know about farming." She discovered Agricultural Education and knows she "has found the right spot." The Agriculture campus "smells like a barn… I'm in heaven!"

Teaching elementary school children has always "felt right" to Beth. Since high school, Beth had been planning on a career in teaching and had engaged in activities and summer programs that supported that goal. She feels that education is a good match for her because "a lot of things fascinate me. That's probably why education is good for me." Beth's only indecision about her major stemmed from her summer work experience at a local human service agency where she was touched by the suffering of clients. "I saw how sometimes people are treated and I just thought that changes needed to happen." During our summer interview, Beth was seriously contemplating a change. "I don't know where I'm headed." However, when asked about her major decision in early September, Beth seemed relieved to announce that she had decided to return to her original "plan" and graduate in May with her education major and then continue in her teaching internship. She has always had "a compassion for and interest in children" and

wants to teach but also would like to volunteer in a social services setting. Beth's major plan was firmly in place with only a slight adjustment in terms of outside interests.

Jay's story revealed just how important the influence of the home culture can be. Unfortunately, Jay had a dismal start in his initial major, realizing that he simply "could not get it (engineering courses) or figure it out." I found Jay's story about deciding on a new major especially interesting because he went back to his childhood passion for history and the family pastime that involved yard sales and buying old history texts. Jay views life through the lens of a historian and says "I can relate it to life." A family friend and former teacher and then several history faculty were influential in shaping how Jay sees himself as a teacher. Jay aspires to achieve the "knowledge, the ability to interact with the students and the expressiveness" demonstrated in the professors' teaching. Now, the professors' support for Jay's academic achievement has encouraged him to consider graduate school and teaching at the college level. Jay just needed to "figure out" the talent and innate skills he would eventually apply to a discipline he really enjoyed.

Lee's academic difficulties combined with "finding something he was interested in" made his search for a major somewhat frustrating. The first two majors Lee considered had grade point average progression requirements that Lee could not satisfy. He found himself drawn to history because of his experience in a general education history class with a particularly engaging professor. "He was great because he knew me." Lee was taken with the professor's "story telling" style of teaching and says "it kinda sticks in my mind." His story demonstrates how significant the impact is when a student who needs to connect with someone is finally able to do so. For his future career, Lee wants to teach and coach in high school. To Lee, being a good teacher means

"serving as a role model and being enthused about" the subject matter. He plans on being the kind of teacher who will take the students out "to experience" learning and hopes the students will "learn from doing it." Even though Lee is "interested" in his new major, he has grade point obstacles to overcome before he can meet his goal of becoming a teacher and a coach.

Important to Lindsey was finding a major that "related to life." Her first career choice was to be a pediatric nurse but her low grade point average in the pre-requisite courses of biology and chemistry ruled out nursing as a major. For Lindsey, the influence of the past – experiences before coming to the university – was most significant in affecting her "major" decision. After talking with several advisors and going through the University catalog, Lindsey found Child and Family Studies as a possible match. Having spent her home life caring for her younger siblings, Lindsey had always had an interest in working with children and in a career the focuses "more on real life." The process of changing her major to an area she really enjoys "took courage" and she credits several of her classes with helping her learn to be more assertive about her choice. "I think they made me feel that I wasn't afraid to be different than what my parents wanted me to be, or what I thought I should be. It made me not afraid to make up my own mind." Lindsey feels strongly about pursuing a career that she really likes and that "relates to life." "I would hate myself for doing a job just for money, a job I hated."

Maxine had learned from and enjoyed her internships and practicum experiences in her Exercise Science courses so it was unsettling to listen to her tell about her difficulties in the science courses and her struggle with the decisions concerning her relationship with her boyfriend, postponing her return to school and "just wanting to

finish." She said, "You get to a point where you are tired. I want to finish up and maybe do an internship or travel." Her final decision on a major seemed to be made in a last-ditch effort to get her degree and move on. Maxine was also in the unfortunate position of not passing or withdrawing from several of the co-requisite courses for her Exercise Science major. Her "major" story began with her interest in Physical Therapy. However, Maxine was "scared" of the higher level chemistry that program required, so she changed to the related major of Exercise Science, which required a less rigorous sequence. Unfortunately, because of her academic difficulties in the physical sciences and relationship problems, Maxine felt pushed to find a less rigorous major and just "finish up" her degree in Psychology.

Sarah was fortunate to come to the university with an open mind, ready to explore and find a major that interested her. Although Sarah initially declared Engineering as her major, she quickly changed to "undecided" and considered that a "benefit" because of her interests in a number of different areas. Her major journey took her through Engineering, English, Chemistry and Pharmacy. Sarah feels it is important to "go for the stuff that interests you." Her choice of major ultimately came as a result of her work experience waiting tables and being a student manager in a campus cafeteria. "I found I like being in charge. The people over me like me. They trust me because I get the job done. I'm hoping they will teach me more because I think that's more than likely what I'm gonna go into...Hotel and Restaurant Management." Sarah easily met the progression requirements for the major and is enjoying the introductory courses.

Relational Matrix	Abby	Alice	Beth	Jay	Lee	Lindsey	Maxine	Sarah
Metaphors / *Themes*	"Figure out a path": A pathfinder	"Finding the right spot": A settler	"It's what you make of it": An artist	"An adventure": An adventurer	"Making connec-tions": A politician	"I don't walk with my head down": A proud recruit	"I don't have a clue": A detective	"Exploring opened my mind": A traveler
Home/ Family	Support/ Social Network	Farm Responsi-bilities and commit-ment to Father	Relation-ships with Family, Friends and Church	Parents and Farm – A sense of self	Pride and small town connections	Responsi-bility for and closeness to family	Responsi-bility for family members and support	Pride and exhibiting family traits
Connect-ing/ Relation-ships	Working at connecting with family, school and work	Knowing people and people knowing me	Growing and changing through relation-ships and their connections	Connecting through persisting and relation-ships with mentors	Meeting people and making helpful connections	Connecting to experiences through friends	Connecting by belonging	Sharing experience with old and new friends
Learning – Hands-on	About self	Relative to the real world	To understand, to know	Persistence and a college mind set	Experienc-ially and knowing people who can help	Making up my own mind – relative to my life	By doing it	Opened my mind
Major Decision	Figuring out a path through the university	Finding the right spot	Following my plan	Discover-ing history at home	Finding something I'm interested in	Relating my major to life	Choosing a major to finish up a degree	Exploring through learning and experiences

Figure 5-4

A RELATIONAL MATRIX OF IMPLIED METAPHORS AND THEMES
(Themes 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Theme 5: Identity

Underlying this final theme of Identity are the other themes of Home and Family,

Connecting – Relationships, Learning – Hands-on and Major Decision. Key to a sense of

identity is the ability of the student to tie together the elements of his/her story. The

previous four story elements contributed to or led to a sense of identity, though not in a

linear way. I refer again to the metaphor of a web. The shared themes were "knots"

within the students' experiences which, depending on the situation, served in explicit or

implicit ways to help the students tie together the fragments of their stories. The successful integration of the parts to a whole leads to a complete story or an identity with a past, present and future – a complete narrative of identity.

Other motifs within this final story element of Identity are:

- The process of making the connections or tying together the fragments of their stories involved the students' willingness to be open to new experiences and to see the world in different ways.

- The process involved establishing independence and a sense of academic and career direction.

- The students saw, as part of their identities, values and traits integrated from their homes and families.

- Through reflecting on their stories of experience, the students were able to see themselves now relative to who they were as new university students.

The process of connecting the fragmented story elements was integral to the students' construction of a sense of identity. A key attitude within that process was the willingness to be open to new experiences and to people who were different from themselves. The students saw themselves as changing and growing as a result of this new learning and new way of thinking about the world around them. Establishing themselves as independent thinkers and young adults with a sense of direction and capable of caring for themselves were key to renegotiating their relationships with family members, especially parents. Part of this renegotiation or reconnecting with home and family was the process of integrating certain values and traits from home with their changing identities.

Throughout the telling of their stories, the students made reference to how they see themselves now, relative to how they used to be as new university students. Implicit in the shared theme of Identity is how the telling of the stories of their experiences of being students contributed to their sense of who they understand themselves to be. As suggested by Turner and Bruner (1986), "Stories serve as meaning-generating interpretive devices which frame the present with a hypothetical past and an anticipated future" (p. 18). The students' stories told of their experience of being a student and its transformative impact on who they understand themselves to be.

The students bring the readers back to the present by sharing their sense of identity relative to their experience of being a university student. Underlying this final theme are the other themes of home and family, connecting, learning and major decision. Key to a sense of identity is the ability of the student to tie together the elements of his/her story. The previous four elements contributed or led to a sense of identity but not in a linear way. Again, the metaphor of a web is helpful when thinking about this process. The shared themes were "knots" within the students' experience which, depending on the situation, served in explicit or implicit ways to help the students tie together the fragments of their stories. At any given point in their narratives, one or another element, or several elements together, were exerting influence on their decisions and actions. The successful integration of the parts to a whole leads to a complete story or an identity with a past, present and future – a complete narrative of identity.

As I reviewed the broad theme of identity and how each student's story was nuanced within that theme, three groups of participants emerged. Abby, Beth and Jay seemed to have fully integrated their stories into a larger story of who they are and how

they see themselves moving toward a future. Alice, Lindsey and Sarah see themselves as changing and growing more independent but are less sure of their specific goals. Lee and Maxine are dealing with conflicting plots and although they have a sense of what is important to them, they have not integrated the different story elements into a strong sense of self. They have no real sense of future direction or "an anticipated future."

For Abby, "change and being more open" is possible because of her strong family "network." She considers herself a very different person than the "scared" first year student who "slept a lot" in the dormitory as a means to avoid her unhappiness. After "figuring out the path" to take through college (deciding on a major), Abby "learned a lot about herself through her coursework" and practica and is liking her more assertive communication style and her newfound ability to "stand up" for her convictions. Abby still "juggles" a very hectic school, home and work schedule but "works" hard at making it all connect. She also is working on allowing time for the more "curious and adventuresome" person inside her to grow. Abby felt she had to "prove she could hold her own" at the university and recognizes that "it's a good feeling when I realized I could!"

Reflecting on her first two years at the university, Alice emphatically says, "I've changed into a totally different person." She told the story of being voted the "second shyest" in my high school class but now she "will strike up a conversation with most anyone." Alice realized that to connect or get to know instructors or new friends, she would have to become friendlier and more open to different people. She feels secure and open to new opportunities since she "found the right spot" and declared her major in Agricultural Education. Alice is excited about applying the new agricultural knowledge

she is learning back on the farm and sharing this knowledge with her father.

Attending the university has helped Alice become "more independent" and more willing

"to do things by myself."

Within Beth's stories of experience is woven the thread of her changing

responsibly in response to new learning about herself and others and relative to becoming

a more independent, yet "dependent" person. Beth uses the word "dependent," or

describes herself as a "contradiction, both independent and dependent," and seems to be

referring to wanting to remain connected to home, family and friends and church and at

the same time "growing." Beth has been relatively goal directed in terms of her major

and future career and has remained committed to a long-term relationship with her

boyfriend, even through some "rocky times." It is obvious that Beth likes to have a plan;

she "wants to know and understand." Beth also sees these qualities as limitations: "I

think it (working through problems) has somewhat changed the way I look at

relationships and life. Before I put way too much emphasis on what was gonna happen."

She realizes that as an "independent" yet "dependent" person, she is capable and ready to

accept change. "I consider that growing."

As I listened to Jay's stories about "struggling," "maneuvering," and "fighting," it

was clear he had integrated his passion for studying military history with his identity and

in his life story. Looking at his experiences with an "historian's" eye gives Jay a unique

perspective on his family relationships and his experience of growing up on a farm.

"Going home really got me refocused on what I wanted and it made me understand where

I got started and where I stand in life." Jay viewed growing up on a farm as teaching him

"responsibility," "respect for people," and the meaning behind "hard work." He reflected

on these qualities as "part of life and the mindset you need for college." By "persisting," Jay negotiated through a maze of financial problems, parental doubt as to his abilities, a declining GPA in a major he "could not figure out," a semester away from the university and finally arrived at an intellectual home which engages him as a student and in a future career. "I can relate it (history) to life. If you don't learn from history, you're going to be defeated."

Lee's identity is tied to his "small town" values of knowing people and making connections and he is struggling to shed the image of the popular high school "jock." A learning disability has made college learning especially difficult for him and it is obvious that he has difficulty seeing himself as a "student." Several times during our interviews, Lee talked about the possibility of joining the Marine Corps because "it's physical and there are no books." Since Lee made it through high school because "he played sports," he never acquired the learning skills needed to cope with his disability. As a result, the meaning Lee attaches to learning in college is based more on the social aspects of "meeting new friends in classes," meeting friends in "study groups," and "knowing" the instructors. Lee is struggling to make sense of his student experience and not "get stuck physically or mentally." Making decisions on his own, talking with his parents about being "independent," quitting the football program and connecting with Disability Services are all attempts by Lee to re-story his identity.

"Being on my own" has been key to Lindsey's new identity as an independent person. For Lindsey, "being on my own" means moving away from home, making her own decisions, changing majors to an area which "relates to life," meeting new friends and committing to a long term relationship. Lindsey's ties with her family are strong,

especially with her younger siblings. She sees herself as a role model for them and hopes "she is the first of many" to attend college. Lindsey feels a responsibility for and closeness to her family members but considers the university "home." It is clear that she enjoys being on her own. "I have a plan and I know the way I'm going. I just feel like I'm home. It's just good."

At this point in her college experience, Maxine finds herself with a story and plot that no longer make sense. In a very frustrated way, she exclaims, "I don't have a clue!" In terms of her student identity, Maxine appears to be on the borders of several communities but does not hold full membership in any of them. Her experience in the band, had been a significant part of Maxine's student life and since quitting she no longer has that structure or support. Partially due to difficulties in academic work, Maxine has changed her major a third time and is no longer associating with faculty and peers in her former department. Maxine's commitment to the African-American community has put some distance between her and family members but at the same time has brought new relationships into her life. But most devastating for Maxine is the ending of the relationship with her African-American boy friend. Maxine has always approached life and learning by "preparing" or "being ready" to focus and accept "the challenges." In her current life-story, she finds it impossible to move to a sense of "being prepared" because she cannot get a glimpse of what her future might bring. Maxine is left "wondering" how she will integrate the changing aspects of her life story and her identity. "I have to regroup and put myself back together. I don't have a clue!"

Sarah's identity and self-story have changed from one centered in upper East Tennessee and a high school fiancé to one of curiosity and "open mindedness" about the

world around her. For Sarah, becoming more independent has meant being "willing to do a lot more stuff" and "opening up" her mind. Her independence is a trait she feels has come from her family. "We're all independent. We all just hate having to answer to somebody." Through her "exploring," Sarah has been exposed to a variety of work and learning experiences and has discovered a major that will build on her strengths and interests and will provide mobility. She sees herself as a more "mature" person and a person who has grown as a result of her college experience. "Coming to college helps you to mature. You find out more about yourself. You are your own person – the experience helps you grow."

The preceding analysis of narratives was an inductive process that moved from the students' stories to common elements or themes. Polkinghorne (1995) describes this as a paradigmatic process. He suggests that "the strength of paradigmatic procedures is their capacity to develop general knowledge about a collection of stories" (p. 15). This process generates general knowledge from a set of particular instances. Although the themes are shared by all of the students, "contextualized and personalized they describe the particularities" of each of the student's experience of being a student (Kramp, 1995, p. 68).

As I studied the common themes of Home – Family, Connecting – Relationships, Learning – Hands-on, Major Decision and Identity, it became obvious that a shared story or a meta-narrative was emerging from the analysis. This meta-narrative was the students' shared story based on the common story elements and it represents

Relational Matrix	Abby	Alice	Beth	Jay	Lee	Lindsey	Maxine	Sarah
Metaphors *Themes*	"Figure out a path": A pathfinder	"Finding the right spot": A settler	"It's what you make of it": An artist	"An adventure": An adventurer	"Making connec-tions": A politician	"I don't walk with my head down": A proud recruit	"I don't have a clue": A detective	"Exploring opened my mind": A traveler
Home/ Family	Support/ Social Network	Farm Responsi-bilities and commit-ment to Father	Relation-ships with family, friends and church	Parents and farm - A sense of self	Pride and small town connections	Responsi-bility for and closeness to family	Responsi-bility for family members and support	Pride and exhibiting family traits
Connect-ing/ Relation-ships	Working at connecting with family, school and work.	Knowing people and people knowing me	Growing and changing through relation-ships and their connections	Connecting through persisting and relation-ships with mentors	Meeting people and making helpful connections	Connecting to experiences through friends	Connecting by belonging	Sharing experiences with old and new friends
Learning-Hands-on	About self	Relative to the real world	To under-stand, to know	Persistence and a college mind set	Experience -ially and knowing people who can help.	Making up my own mind – courage to change	By doing it	Opened my mind
Major Decision	Figuring out a path through the university	Finding the right spot	Following my plan	Discover-ing history at home	Finding something I'm interested in	Relating my major to life	Choosing a major to finish degree – the shortest path	Exploring through learning and experiences
Identity	Being open to new experiences	Changing as a result of knowing and new learning	Gaining indepen-dence through responsi-bility and commit-ment	Integrating a historical perspective with home and new knowledge	Working at not being stuck-working at becoming indepen-dent	Being on my own-indepen-dent yet responsive to family	Regrouping and seeking direction	Growing/ Changing-open to new experiences

Figure 5-5

A RELATIONAL MATRIX OF IMPLED METAPHORS AND THEMES
(Themes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)

the students' experience of being students at the university. The analysis moves from common story elements or themes to the meta-narrative.

Part Two: Narrative Analysis: Meta-Narrative

The common story elements are used to emplot (configure) a meta-narrative that is shared by the students. This process is narrative analysis – moving from common elements to a narrative. The previous analysis completed in Chapter Four and in Part One of this chapter were analysis of narrative – moving from stories to common clusters or elements, then to themes and motifs. I have extracted the common story elements of **Home-Family, Connecting-Relationships, Learning-Hands-on, Major Decision and Identity** and used these as themes or elements of the shared story or meta-narrative of the students' experience.

Polkinghorne (1995) suggests that the meta-narrative provides "the clarification of the uncertainty involved in the research question" (p. 15). This particular meta-narrative further clarifies the research question in terms of understanding the students' accounts of their experiences, what those experiences mean to them and how their university experience connects with their home culture. The meta-narrative provides a context and model for considering the experience of this particular group of students at the university and implications for practice. It is the synthesis of the data elements and serves as a general narrative of the experience of rural, first-generation students from Southern Appalachia at a particular university. The meta-narrative represents all of the student participants but it does not re-create any one particular student's story. It is the result of my hermeneutic interpretation of the students' stories, represents my view as the

researcher and, along with the analysis in Part One, presents the general findings of the research study.

First, I considered Labov's (in Cortazzi, 1993) six-part structure of a narrative of personal experience relative to the shared themes. Then, I represented that structure in a figure that displays the emplotment or configuration of the themes in the plot of the meta-narrative of the students' shared experience. As Polkinghorne (1995) suggests, "A plot provides the systematic unity to the story and is the glue that connects the parts together" (p. 18).

In constructing the figure of the meta-narrative, I used the plot to relate the themes in a meaningful way. Conceptually, I considered Labov's (in Cortazzi, 1993) suggestion that a fully formed oral narrative of personal experience has a six-part structure. Labov states that the parts of the six-part structure "can be viewed as answers to the audience questions" (p. 44). This particular model is referred to as the "evaluation model" because it draws "attention to the way tellers give their perspective on the narrative content by evaluating the meaning it has for them" (p. 44).

The first element is the *Abstract* and conveys the "general propositions which often go beyond the immediate events in the narrative" (p. 45). It represents the question, *What was this about?* The second part, *Orientation*, answers the questions of *Who?*, *When?*, *What? and Where?*. The Orientation presents the background "which the teller believes the audience requires to understand the narrated events" (p. 45). The *Complication*, or third element, shows a turning-point, a crisis, a problem or a series of these. It answers the question, *So What?* The fourth part, *Result*, answers the question, *What finally happened?* It represents the resolution to a conflict in the narrative. The

Coda is optional and when used brings the listeners back to the present moment. There is no corresponding question because the coda "finishes the narrative by announcing, 'I've finished'" (p. 47).

Using Labov's evaluation model, Figure 5-6 demonstrates how the common themes of the meta-narrative are made explicit in each of Labov's narrative structural elements. Polkinghorne (1995) explains that this model "is a kind of self-receipt through which the speaker gives the meaning of the narrative" (p. 47). Conceptually, this model represents how the students connected the shared story elements or themes and made meaning of their experiences. The six-part structure is listed down the left side of the figure. The three columns represent the Question, the Response and an Example from the Data (interview texts) that relates to the specific narrative structural element.

The *Abstract* of the meta-narrative begins by placing the students in their **Home Culture** with the family and includes the students' stories of their experience of deciding to attend the University. The meta-narrative continues with *Orientation*, which gives the information necessary to understand the students' stories of becoming a University student and the many aspects of **Connecting** with the University. **Learning** is the key element involved in the *Complication*. Learning takes place for the students in all aspects of their lives – home, general university environment, classroom, work experiences and relationships. As a result of this learning, the students tell stories of making decisions that affect their lives and academic goals– these are **Major Decisions**. The *Result* is a sense of self or **Identity**. The students told stories of how they see themselves now, relative to who they were at the beginning of their stories. The *Coda* brings the reader

LABOV'S STRUCTURE	QUESTION	RESPONSE (Common Themes)	EXAMPLE FROM THE DATA
ABSTRACT	What was this story about? It signals the start of the story.	HOME-FAMILY The story begins in the student's home culture and presents the student's decision to attend the university.	Alice chose the university because there was "no way in the world I could leave my father...he needs my help...it was the closest school."
ORIENTATION	Who? What? When? Where? How? It gives the necessary context.	CONNECTING-RELATIONSHIPS The story continues as the student describes his/her experience of becoming a university student and connecting with the university.	Lee said, "I really think the main thing with me, from my freshman year until now, is that I'm really glad that I've been able to be open and talk to people...I like knowing the teachers and I like the teachers to be interested in me."
COMPLICATION	Then what happened? It shows a turning point, a crisis or a problem and is usually a series of these.	LEARNING-HANDS-ON New learning and experience contributes to and complicates the student's experience of change and intellectual and personal growth.	Lindsey said that her new major "has classes I'm really interested in and want to study. The professors focus more on real life than the Chemistry department does." Her philosophy and sociology courses "gave me a lot of nerve to change, to make me think...it made me not afraid to make up my own mind."
EVALUATION	So what? It is used by the narrator to indicate the point of the story – why it was told.	MAJOR DECISION Through a complicated process of integrating his/her learning and experiences, the student shares his/her experience of deciding on personal, academic and career goals.	Reflecting back on her journey to a major, Sarah felt that being undecided was "a benefit 'cause I've been interested in a lot of subjects and I've tried to take classes in most of them. So I tried to get experience and that kind of opened my mind."
RESULT	What finally happened? It describes the result of resolution to a conflict in the narrative.	IDENTITY Throughout the telling of his/her story, the student makes reference to how he/she sees himself/herself now, relative to how he/she was as a new university student.	As Jay reflected on his "whole experience" he said," I had trouble getting here, starting right, dorm life, professors (good and bad). It took 6 years to get a 4-year degree BUT I'm making good money...I finally get the chance to think back on it. I'm the first to go to college – the one who will do a lot of things my family won't get to do. That is a big thing for me."
CODA	The coda finishes the narrative by returning the listeners to the present moment.	UNIVERSITY CULTURE The transformative impact of the student's telling of his/her story is evident in the individual student's summary of his/her experience of being a student within the university culture.	Reflecting on the stories she told about her university experience, Sarah summarized by saying, "Coming to college helps you to mature. You find out more about yourself and you're out on your own. You are your own person – the experience helps you grow."

FIGURE 5-6

LABOV'S NARRATIVE ELEMENTS AND THE COMMON THEMES OF THE META-NARRATIVE

back to the present – to where the students are now – students in or members of the **University Culture**.

Figure 5-7 is a representation of the emplotment or configuration of the common themes or story elements that make up the meta-narrative or shared story as shown through the previous discussion of Labov's personal narrative structure. A plot is constructed by relating and/or sequencing events, happenings, actions and experiences, thus conveying a sense of meaning and movement. The story begins in the Home Culture and ends in the University Culture as presented in the boxes at the top left and right hand side of the figure. Each box along the inverted V-shaped line presents one of the shared themes and corresponds to a structural element in Labov's evaluation model. The inverted V represents a plot line which rises to the high-point or complication/conflict in the story and then falls to the resolution or result. The arrows pointing to University Culture and back to Home Culture represent the students' ongoing process of connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting with the larger stories of home-family and university that continue to influence how they configure the themes of their story plots and their identities. Polkinghorne (1989) suggests that the experience of self is organized along the temporal dimension in the same manner that the events of a narrative are organized by the plot into a unified story. The successful integration of the parts to a whole leads to a complete story or an identity with a past, present and future – a complete narrative of identity.

Through the hermeneutic process of interpretation, going back and forth between the actual student stories, the emerging themes and the resulting meta-narrative, I have a better understanding how these particular students constructed their world and how they
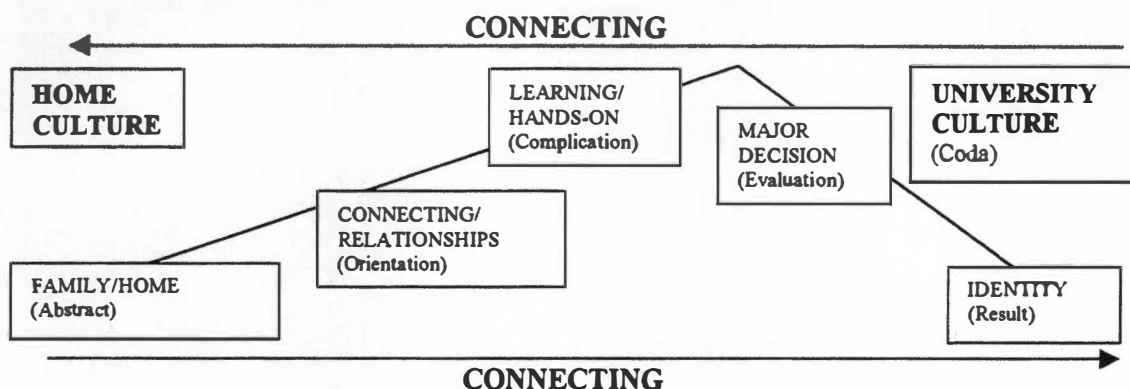
Figure 5-7

THE PLOT OF THE META-NARRATIVE OF THE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE AT A UNIVERSITY

constructed their identities. In telling their stories, the students made meaning of their

experiences in the world. It is how they understood the world and how they

constructed their identity relative to the world. Turner and Bruner (1986) suggest that

stories are "culturally constructed expressions (which) are among the most universal

means of organizing and articulating experience" (p. 15). It is through an analysis of

these stories of experience that I have come to a new understanding of how these students

made meaning of their experiences within the context of the university culture and how

their home culture continued to exert a powerful influence on their decisions and actions.

As mentioned in the opening paragraphs of this section, Polkinghorne (1995)

suggests that the meta-narrative provides "the clarification of the uncertainty involved in

the research question" (p. 15). In this section, the process of presenting and discussing

the meta-narrative was a synthesizing of the story elements and themes of **Home-Family,**

Connecting – Relationships, Learning – Hands-on, Major Decision and Identity and

serves as a general narrative of the experience of a rural, first-generation student from

Southern Appalachia at a particular university. Through the analysis of narrative and narrative analysis, I presented data that further clarified the research question in terms of understanding the students' accounts of their experiences, what those experiences mean to them and how their university experience connects with their home culture. The final chapter of this study will address how these findings (analysis of narrative and narrative analysis) relate to the existing literature, and will draw out from them some implications for university policy and practice and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER SIX

THE END OF A STORY: AN INVITATION

*The end of a story is best seen as
an invitation to begin a new place
in the conversation.
(Barone, 1995, p. 72)*

Introduction

The last chapter of this research story serves not only as a discussion of findings relative to the literature, implications for policy and practice and recommendations for future research but also as an "invitation to begin a new place in the conversation" (Barone, 1995, p. 72). The texts of the students' narratives and the storied analysis revealed how they ordered and gave meaning to what happened in their lives as university students. The themes that emerged from the individual stories pointed to the essence of each student's experience and invited the reader to consider a more in-depth understanding of those experiences. Such an invitation encourages readers to consider their own stories within the context of the university. Barone (1995) suggests that "the art of writing an artfully persuasive educational story is one with the potential of luring readers into reconstructing themselves as school people or into rethinking their own selves and situations as educators" (p. 66).

The purpose of this narrative study was to obtain and analyze first hand accounts (stories) of rural, first-generation students from Southern Appalachia in order to understand their collegiate experiences in light of the home culture they brought with them. Based on my university experience working with similar students and a review of

relevant literature, I determined there was a need for research studies that: a) seek to understand the meaning, for these students, of the events, situations and actions they are involved with, and of the accounts they give of their lives and experiences as college students, b) seek to understand how these students make sense of their lives in the context of their home culture and the university and how their understandings influence their behavior, and c) provide data, which can assist faculty, administrators and staff in understanding these students' experiences.

The study was a phenomenological study in which I used narrative as both the method of inquiry and the object of interpretation. Influencing this study was my point of view as a qualitative researcher and those theories that provided the lens through which I viewed the study; constructivism and critical theory. The participants were eight, first-generation university students from rural, Southern Appalachia. Using an in-depth phenomenological interview format, each participant was interviewed at least twice and served as a co-collaborator in the research process by reviewing and giving feedback on both the interview transcriptions and the storied analysis.

After analyzing the individual student's stories, I created a portrait of each student based on the patterns and themes and the connections between them. Using these themes along with description and direct quotes from the interviews, I re-storied the students' stories into individual portraits that have a narrative or story-like structure. Each of the stories represents the unique themes and the larger story worlds of the students. The larger stories meshed with the individual stories providing a clearer understanding of their experiences and the connection between their home culture and their university experience.

As I read and analyzed the narratives of the eight students, it became evident that there were common elements and themes across the stories. The themes that emerged from the stories were:

- Most of the students' decisions and actions were taken with or made with their allegiance to home and family values or relationships foremost in their minds.

- The students came from a home-culture that emphasized close ties (connections) to family, kin and their surrounding communities. It became evident that they came to the university looking for connections and expecting to find relationships with faculty, new friends and the environment.

- The students in this study learned best when actively engaged in their learning and when they were able to relate the learning to some aspect of their lives and thus became actively engaged in the learning process.

- As the eight students struggled with their "major decision," it was evident that the influence of home and family, their need for connecting and relationships, and their hands-on learning style played a significant role in affecting how the students pulled away from certain majors and gravitated towards others.

- Key to a sense of identity is the ability of the student to tie together the elements of his/her story. The previous four story elements contributed to or led to a sense of identity, though not in a linear way.

These themes suggest shared stories embedded in the larger story of the students' experiences. The analysis of narratives was an inductive process, which moved from the students' stories to common themes across the stories. I developed these themes from the data and explored relationships, connections and commonalities among them. The themes served to explicate the experience of the student in the university culture and their home culture and reflected the students' particular experiences as told in their stories. As each theme was discussed, a relational matrix was presented which displayed the particularities of the common themes for each student. After the final common theme was discussed, a completed matrix was presented which displayed the common themes and how these themes were nuanced in each student's story.

The analysis then moved from common story elements or themes (analysis of narrative) to the meta-narrative (narrative analysis). The common themes represent the elements used to emplot (configure) a meta-narrative of experience that is shared by the students. The meta-narrative is based on Labov's (in Cortazzi, 1993) suggestion that a fully formed oral narrative of personal experience has a six-part structure: Abstract, Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, Result and Coda. The analysis continued by showing how the common themes or story elements of the meta-narrative were made explicit in each of Labov's narrative structural elements.

The summary of the narrative analysis was presented in a display of the emplotment or configuration of the common themes or story elements that made up the meta-narrative. The process of presenting and discussing the meta-narrative was a synthesizing of the data elements and served as a general narrative of the experience of rural, first-generation students from Southern Appalachia at a particular university.

Through analysis of narrative and narrative analysis, I presented data that further clarified the research question in terms of understanding the students' accounts of their experiences, what those experiences mean to them and how their university experience connects with their home culture.

Discussion of Findings

Polkinghorne (1995) suggests, "In producing the story, the researcher draws on disciplinary expertise to interpret and make sense of the responses and actions" (p. 19). At this point, it makes sense to return to the literature relative to the findings made explicit through the analysis of narrative (shared themes) and narrative analysis (meta-narrative).

When considering the following discussion, it is important for the reader to understand that the findings from this study are relevant to the context of this particular university and to this particular group of student participants. The findings are not considered generalizaible to all colleges and universities or to all students who might meet the specific criteria for this study. However, important issues were raised during the telling and the analysis of the students' stories. These issues are a part of the discussion in the current literature. The student perspectives presented in this study give faculty and administrators the opportunity to become "critically engaged" in the students' experiences and stories and to see how a new or different understanding might offer insight for policy and practice for other students.

At various points in their stories, the students disconnected and reconnected with their homes and families and went through a process of renegotiating relationships based on their new learning and experiences. As the students told stories about and described their families and homes it became apparent that their experiences were "meshed" in the "larger story" of family and home (Kenyon and Randall, 1997). Kenyon and Randall believe that the larger story of family represents the first "culture" we all experience and is the most "potent." The common theme of **Home – Family** and its motifs appear in all of the students' stories but with different particularities and with varying degrees of emphasis and at different points in time. As the data analysis progressed, it was apparent the powerful influence Home and Family exerted on the decisions and actions of these students as they told their stories of experience.

As suggested by Batteau (1991), Halperin (1990), Plaut (1983) and Speer (1993) in their discussions of rural Appalachian culture, the social relationships of family and kin are enduring and hold great significance in the lives of people from this region, and this is certainly true in the lives of these students. The same authors agree that a sense of place or close ties to a relatively small geographical area is typical of people who live in rural areas. In addition, the profiles of the students' families were congruent with those described in the above-mentioned studies: families were located in "shallow" rural areas – middle ground between city and country, parents most often held multiple jobs in wage labor or blue collar positions or a combination of home employment (farming) with wage labor, and in general, educational attainment ceased at the secondary level.

Hanson (1998), Levine & Cureton (1998) and Tierney (1993, 1992) examined the changes taking place in the college student population and noted particular "cultural"

shifts that are affecting college attendance. All of the student participants were first-generation college students and were from lower income families – both parents (or parent) held blue-collar jobs or worked on a farm and several parents worked more than one job. Financial considerations were a critical part of the decision to attend the university and for the most part, the students worked out the financial arrangements on their own.

Lower income and first-generation status students were noted as being more at risk than the traditional student. There appeared to be little parental involvement in the process of choosing a college. Six of the eight students mentioned that a "friend" had been influential in their decision to attend the university. Speer (1993) noted that the lack of parental and sibling knowledge about higher education can make access to college difficult for the first-generation student. In this study, it appeared as though the students themselves acquired the knowledge needed to gain entrance to the university and the financial means to support themselves (need-based scholarships, academic scholarships, athletic scholarship, band scholarship, financial aid, and part time work).

For the most part, the families of these students were supportive of the students' collegiate academic goal but at the same time caused frustration or complications. As mentioned in several studies (Bennett, 1986; Borman, et al., 1988; Cavender, 1981; Keefe, et al., 1991), families not only provided a web of support but also one of entanglement. Similar to the studies that involved schooling at the secondary level, several of these students were asked to return home to assist with various crisis or problems and did so willingly, but not without a cost to their academic work. Several of the other students in this study mentioned that they would go home immediately if called

upon. The frustrations and complications arose as the students tried to re-enter the university and classroom situations and involved requesting readmission to the university, late withdrawal from classes or attempting to negotiate Incomplete grades due to the missed coursework.

It appears that key to these students' continued success at the university was their ability to remain connected to their home and families, even if those relationships required a renegotiation of understanding. Van Maanen (1984) suggests that "one does not abandon the first culture for the second but will shape understandings and responses to new demands" (p. 240). Phelan, et al. (1991) in their article that addresses how meanings and understandings derived from the students' different worlds affect students' engagement with schools and learning, describe a "multiple worlds model" that requires more than an understanding of other cultures. The authors suggest that students should not give up or hide certain aspects of their lives but should acquire skills and strategies to work comfortably and successfully with different people in divergent social settings (p. 246). This approach suggests a form of bi-cultural competence or perhaps even a form of multi-cultural competence.

Kenyon and Randal (1997) speak to the notion of "restorying" life experiences and relationships based on new experiences and the need to make sense out of bits and pieces of experience. Bean & Metzner (1985) and Tierney (1992) respond to more traditional models of student persistence by suggesting that family and home culture are a continuing and important influence and that students should not be asked to commit a type of "cultural suicide" (a discarding of one's home culture) once admitted to college. As the student participants in this study successfully renegotiated their home and family

connections and acquired new strategies and skills to do so, their stories reflected a more integral sense of completeness.

The common theme, **Connecting – Relationships,** represents a continuous process that connects the Home – Family and University cultures. Terenzini, et al., in their 1994 study of non-traditional students and their transition to college, suggest that further research is needed about the subtle and complex ways first-generation students negotiate separation from their home culture and families. For the eight students in this study, I saw the process of separation as a renegotiation of connections and relationships. Along the common theme of Connecting – Relationships, there are many different experiences of connect, disconnect, negotiate and renegotiate. Terenzini, et al. (1994) refer to such experiences as maintaining or rejecting their personal and cultural integrity.

As I listened to the students' stories and examined the motifs underlying this particular theme, it appeared that the students were adjusting their stories to accommodate a new setting, new characters and perhaps ultimately a new plot line. Kenyon and Randall (1997) suggest that "we are continually having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives" (p. 160). These students came from a home-culture that emphasized close ties (connections) to family, kin and their surrounding communities. Loyal Jones (1991) refers to this cultural trait as "personalism" (p. 171). He asserts that "One of the main aims in life for Appalachians is to relate well with other persons… mountain people place a high value on their relations with others and it takes something mighty important to cause us to jeopardize these relationships" (p. 171).

The shared theme of Family and Home is closely related to the common theme of Connecting – Relationships. As discussed, maintaining ties with Family and Home are

seen as important ways student connect and are factors which influence a student's persistence in college. Rather than separate the student from his/her home culture, colleges and universities should consider models which are "based on a more integrative framework" (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera, et al., 1992; Murguia, et al., 1991; Phelan, et al., 1991; Tierney, 1992). Murguia, et al. (1991), in their study of social integration and ethnicity, suggest it is difficult "for students to leave their ethnicity outside the campus gates. It is unnecessary and unwise to require students to do so" (p. 438). For the particular students in this study, it was difficult for them to leave their ties to a strong family and home culture "at the gate." Working at keeping the family and home ties and the underlying support was an important way the students sustained relationships and connections.

As university students, they were experiencing new ways of learning that involved connecting with their teachers. All of the students told stories of teachers who "connected" with them. Connecting with teachers had various meanings – "knowing my name," "taking time to talk with me," "caring about students," and "relating to us." It was clear from the students' stories that they felt they learned best when the professor or instructor "connected" with them. Unfortunately, the students also told stories of feeling "intimidated," "destroyed," like "just a number," or "not able to connect," with their professors and instructors which, according to the students, resulted in poor grades in that particular class or a negative learning experience. The students' stories of feeling "isolated" from their instructors appears to be related to the growing gap between faculty and student cultures, especially at large research institutions (Astin and Chang, 1995; Atkinson & Tuzin, 1992; Dalton, 1989; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Van Maanen, 1987).

All of the students "connected" with the university by means of the peer groups they established through class projects and group work, organizations, informal interactions in particular places on campus where students congregated, residence halls, and on-campus jobs. Peers were seen as providing support or a "safety net" when away from home. For some students this was important while for others, the safety net was still the connection with home. Meeting students through class activities was important to those students who commuted, while those students living on campus or involved in student organizations (band, athletics, on campus jobs) focused more often on friends met outside of class. Astin (1985, 1993), Baxter-Magolda (1992), Kuh (1995) and Tinto (1997) note that these types of involvement with student peer groups is key to student retention and persistence.

When the students encountered difficulties connecting with home or university cultures and were unable to establish relationships, these difficulties were experienced as obstacles with which the students had to cope and overcome. In certain cases, the obstacles were seen as barriers too great to overcome (not being prepared in high school, failure in science and math courses, instructors "not caring," the pull to help back home and failed relationships). A growing number of scholars support the need for studies that examine these obstacles from a cultural perspective in order to explicate the possible barriers and boundaries within the university culture that inhibit student success (Cabrera, et al., 1992; Giroux, 1992; Keeton, 1992; London, 1989; McDade, 1988; Phelan, et al., 1991; Terenzini, et al, 1994 &1996; Van Maanen, 1987). Through the analysis of the students' stories, this narrative study was able to point to certain aspects of the university culture that were not working for the students. Van Maanen (1987) suggests that culture

"is most apparent to people only when it is not working for them, when standard practices beget unstandard results" (p. 248).

According to John Dewey (in Clandinin & Connelly, 1994), education, experience and life are inextricably intertwined. Following Dewey's line of thinking, one learns about education from thinking about life, and one learns about life from thinking about education. As these eight students told stories about their experiences of learning at the university, it was clear that learning held many different meanings from the very specific "hands on" and "putting it into simple words" to "learning about life" and "opening my eyes and mind." The common theme of **Learning – Hands-on** represents how the students preferred to learn at the university and in their everyday lives.

Kenyon and Randall (1997) consider formal education as a "system for storying the world where storying is the synonym for making meaning" (p. 109). Formal education is placed on a continuum with the "transmission of knowledge" at one end and "transformation" at the other. Under transmission one would find stories where meaning was "made for us," the students were passive receivers and were "submitting to school," and situations where our lives were "storied for us." At the other end of the continuum, transformation would include "making our own meaning," being active creators and engaging in critical thinking, composing a story of our own and "learning how we are caught in our own history" (p. 109).

The students' stories of learning fell in line with the developmental theories reviewed in Chapter Two (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Chickering and Riesser, 1993; and Perry, 1970). The students who were close to graduating or already finished focused on learning about self, understanding and gathering information and drawing conclusions.

This type of learning corresponds to the more complex levels of Perry's (1970) and Baxter-Magolda's (1992) models. All of the remaining students had moved beyond the initial stages of acquiring information and repeating it (Baxter-Magolda) or a dualistic framework (Perry) but most wanted to learn in such a way that it related to the "real world."

Relative to this comment, Schroeder (1993) suggests that more than half of the students in his study learned best "in situations characterized by direct, concrete experience with moderate to high degrees of structure" (p. 17). It was apparent from their stories that for the most part, these students felt they learned best when "doing it" and when it related to the "real world."

It was evident from their stories that the students learned in many different environments, not just in the classroom. As was suggested by Astin (1985, 1993), Baxter-Magolda (1992) and Kuh (1995), institutions should encourage students to take advantage of existing education opportunities, many of which are outside of the classroom. The opportunities the students had to meet students who were different from themselves affected their learning process. They met some new people in classrooms but most often outside of class in study groups, informal gathering places, work environments, student organizations or residence halls. Most of the student participants viewed this new understanding of difference as a positive change in themselves and one that separated them from most if not all family members and friends at home. Phelan, et al. (1991) suggest that it is this knowledge and understanding of differences that helps students negotiate the multiple cultures in an educational environment.

As discussed in the previous section, the students felt that the most positive learning experiences took place when they felt "connected" with the instructors. Several of the students expressed that they were "surprised" when an instructor called them by name and specifically related the size of the class to the instructor connecting with them. With the exception of one student, all of the students disliked large lecture classes and felt "isolated" and "not important" in them, and for many of them, the lowest grades on their transcripts are courses that were taught in the large, lecture format. Most often, these were the science courses, which most of the students failed or from which they withdrew.

Several scholars suggest that the way science courses and more professional-oriented curricula (such as engineering, nursing, business) are structured leads to some students being able to acquire "academic capital" easier than other students (Eisenhardt, 1990; McDade, 1988; Nespar, 1990). McDade (1988) asserts, in a study of college retention and attrition in science and mathematics courses, that there is a way of "knowing that college women and men who left the chemistry and mathematics departments did not cultivate during their undergraduate study" (p. 107). She further explains that the students did not have a "critical vision necessary to frame...the many ways of coming to learn and know a discipline" (p. 107). For the students in this study, the structure of the science courses (large lectures) contributed to their sense of feeling disconnected from the instructor and from the learning experience. Although the courses often have small laboratory sections, the learning and interaction in the lab did not make up for the learning that was absent from the lecture. The students' applied learning styles

and ways of knowing were not a good match with the teaching pedagogies that were used in the sciences.

Similar to those studies cited in the literature review concerning undergraduate learning in research universities, the growing gap between faculty and undergraduates in research universities appears to affect these students' learning. (Atkinson &Tuzin, 1991; Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Moffat, 1989; Schroeder, 1993; Tinto; 1997). Within the cultures of research universities, there is conflict over the priorities of research and undergraduate teaching. Atkinson and Tuzin (1991) assert that the "relative overvaluation of research has done more that separate undergraduates and faculty – it has estranged them" (p. 27). The students in this study are experiencing, to some degree, this distance. Nevertheless, there were stories told by the students of professors who were very involved with their learning and who served as mentors in selected majors.

The common story element of **Major Decision** particularly refers to the process that the eight students went through as they decided on an academic major and future career. There are many underlying decisions students must make as they move towards a collegiate academic home and many factors influencing their decisions. As the students struggled with their decisions, all of them considered issues in one or more categories of academic major, academic achievement, extracurricular involvement, and interaction with faculty that Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found to influence students' major and career choices. In addition, the continued influence of home and family, the need for connecting and the learning styles of the students played both explicit and implicit roles as they pulled away from certain majors and gravitated towards others. At different

points in their stories, one or more of these emerged as influencing factors as the students struggled with making sense of their academic/career goals.

Chickering's and Riesser's (1993) sixth vector of student development involves developing purpose, including vocational plans and aspirations, personal interests and interpersonal and family commitments. It is in this broad sense that I discussed "major decision." Deciding on a major involves a complicated series of decisions focusing on the defining of values, interests, strengths, weaknesses, goals and commitments. The most visible end product is perhaps the official declaration of a major and career choice, but in reality the student has taken a complex journey. As the eight students struggled with their decisions, various factors influenced them – academic major, academic achievement, extracurricular involvement, interaction with faculty and work experience – the same factors that Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) found in their review of the literature on academic major and career choice of college students. The students in this study all traveled through various majors and career choices while at the same time they engaged in learning about themselves, the world around them and began to tell stories about who they might become.

In the process of selecting their majors, the students re-visited their ties to home and family, their need for connection, and their particular learning style, all of which exerted influence on their decisions. Initially (as entering first year students), all of the students had declared majors in professional or scientific areas (biological sciences, teaching, engineering, nursing, pre-medicine, pre-physical therapy). By the completion of the study, all had decided on majors and careers that are related to their home experiences (teaching, social work, agricultural extension work, child-care). These are areas with

which the students are familiar and professions that represent a certain set of values that have been discussed as being important to these particular students (home - family, connecting - relationships, learning - hands-on). They are also careers new to their immediate families. Such a move from blue-collar and industrial jobs to positions within larger service organizations is noted in the literature focusing on the economy of the Appalachian region (Halperin, 1990; Moore, 1994; Plaut, 1983).

Perhaps most significant and of greatest concern is the students' move away from science-oriented or professional majors (Atkinson and Turzin, 1992; Eisenhardt, 1990; McDade, 1988; Nespar, 1990; Schroeder, 1993). This concern has been discussed in the preceding sections but carries the same urgent message – it appears these students were not able to acquire the necessary disciplinary "way of knowing" to succeed in these courses and hence could not pursue the majors related to the basic science courses.

Part of this concern may be related to the way research universities have moved away from a core curriculum that emphasizes general learning and knowledge to a curriculum in which most of the lower level courses are entry courses relative to a specific discipline with the purpose to exclude and eliminate (Atkinson and Turzin, 1992). Atkinson and Turzin note that this phenomenon might push students prematurely into majors before they have acquired the more general academic knowledge needed to succeed. The overall result is a "chilling effect on general education" and multiple changes in majors leading to "dispirited students" (p. 27).

As Kenyon and Randal (1997) suggest, "an inability to fit events together in an order that at least seems to make sense, to make narrative connection, is a radical incompetence at being human. As this feeling of disconnectedness builds, our frustrations

rise – until we do what we must to 'get it together'" (p. 103). As mentioned earlier in this section, all of the students expressed a great relief when the final decision had been made about their major – their collegiate experience seemed to come together at that point. Gordon (1995) suggests, in her article concerning undecided college students, "developing an identity on which to base a career purpose happens later (after the first year) in the college experience for many students. The critical task of identifying and clarifying work values must be encouraged during the exploration process. The ultimate goal is to develop a clear sense of self in a vocational context" (p. 95). As the students explored the university and the world of work and became more comfortable with their own sense of self, they moved to a point where the "major decision" could take place with some sense of commitment.

The events and actions that were integrated in the plots of the students' stories are linked to their life story or the common theme of **Identity**. An individual's answer to the question "Who am I?" is a type of narration. The experience of self is organized along the temporal dimension in the same manner that the events of a narrative are organized by the plot into a unified story (Polkinghorne, 1989). Self-identity is actually a narrative in process. It is being constructed and discovered at the same time. For these eight students, establishing a sense of identity involved constructing a meaningful story out of previously unintegrated events and actions through emplotment, a process that eventually leads to a sense of completeness and wholeness. Van Manen (1990) suggests that a "theme gives shape to the shapeless" (p. 88). As these students told me their stories and the themes emerged, their individual identities took shape.

Keefe, et al., (1991) suggest that for rural Appalachian students, the family provides the foundation for self-identity and for perceptions about the way in which the world is organized. Spatig (1994) found no change in the rural Appalachian students' attitudes after they completed their bachelors degrees and student teaching experience. In contrast, Cole (1995) discovered that the students in her ethnographic study renegotiated their identities in ways that were in opposition to their Appalachian cultural heritage. The students in this study see themselves as changing in positive ways and also in ways that distance them from certain aspects of family and friends at home. However, throughout this study, the students returned to and at times moved away from their home culture but continued to reconnect and renegotiate their identities relative to their new experiences and the traits they valued from home and family.

The students' process of moving back and forth between the common themes of the meta-narrative is cyclical, not linear. Kuh (1995) suggests that the more traditional student development and persistence models are presumed to unfold in a "linear, sequential and orderly fashion" (p. 126). It was obvious from the students' stories that the five themes are shared but are connected at different levels of experience and are either explicit or implicit depending on the specific plot or story line. In this sense, the models presented in the studies by Astin (1993), Baxter-Magolda (1992), Bean & Metzner, 1985 and Chickering and Reisser (1993) are more helpful for this non-traditional group of students. These particular studies consider the attributes of the changing college student population noted in the articles by Hanson (1998) and Levine & Cureton (1998). A more linear approach to studying student development (Perry, 1970) or persistence (Tinto, 1987) is not as helpful with this particular group of students.

Tierney's (1992) objection to Tinto's model of social integration relative to persistence as actually being assimilationist appears pertinent to the students in this study. For these students, ties to home and family often provided the support necessary for them to persist.

Also, those studies that point to current gaps in the student persistence literature would help address the areas of concern for this particular group of students and thus contribute to the understanding of how they form their student identities and persist to graduation. Specifically insightful are those studies which address factors external to the university (home and family) as impacting persistence (Cabrera, et al, 1992; Murguia, et al., 1991; Tierney, 1992). Also, those studies that address new areas for research within the university environment (organizational culture, classroom culture and learning outside of the classroom) are congruent with the findings of this study (Berger and Braxton, 1998); Gibson, 1984; Kuh, 1995).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The discussion of implications for policy and practice follow the general outline of the meta-narrative, using the shared themes as specific categories for policy and practice recommendations. Organizing the discussion in this manner might be helpful to the professor or administrator interested in determining at what points in a student's experience certain programs, interventions or pedagogies might be most beneficial.

<u>Home – Family</u>

- Based on the findings of this study, the influence of Home and Family continued throughout the student participants' experience at the university. In considering the importance of Home and Family in the lives of these students, it is appropriate to consider how university policies are implemented and if an increased understanding of the connection to home and family would provide insight in administering certain policies. An example of this concern emerged in the analysis of the students' academic records and advising files. Several of the student participants had requested and eventually had been granted late withdrawals from courses. The primary reason for requesting the withdrawals had to do with family and home obligations, such as extra help needed on the farm, help needed at home to care for an elderly relative, family home burned down and help was needed at home. The second most common reason given for the late withdrawal request involved conflicts having to do with work, such as an increase in work hours, a change in work schedule that conflicted with class time, or having to take on an extra job. Several of these requests were initially denied because the students had previous withdrawals for the same reason. A series of questions might be helpful in assessing university academic policy - Is it reasonable for administrators and faculty to expect students not to go home to help? Is it reasonable to expect students not to work extra when they are basically supporting themselves? Is it reasonable to expect that these problems will only occur once or twice in a students' collegiate career and that students have control of these problems? Perhaps there is a need for faculty and administrators to re-

examine how our own values affect decisions concerning the implementation of certain academic policies and how those values might be in direct conflict with the home and family values brought to the university by students similar to the participants in this study.

- As the students were making decisions about college attendance, it appeared that for the most part the parents were supportive, but there was little discussion at home concerning the college experience and the difference between being a college student and a high school student. Based on the findings of this study and on the literature, this is often the case in a home where the student is the first to attend a college or university. Currently, the university does not collect information concerning first-generation college student status on its admission application. I would recommend that this is a critical piece of data, which if known, would help university recruiters determine what types of information and communication would be most appropriate and helpful for these students and their parents. Perhaps an evaluation, using defined focus groups, of current promotional and informational materials as well as current practices would provide precise recommendations as to how the university could better connect with this specific group of parents and students.

- In this study, all but one of the students attended the freshman summer orientation program. None of the parents attended the program. The current orientation program is geared more toward the traditional student and parents and assumes that parents can arrange to take two to three days off from work. Current university communication efforts are developed for parents who have a certain

level of knowledge and understanding of the university culture. The parents of the student participants in this study were employed in blue-collar jobs or worked on a farm and several held more than one job. When asked why the parents did not attend orientation, every student participant responded that the parents had to work, but also the parents did not understand why it was important for them to attend the program since they were not the ones going to college. If the data on first-generation college students were available for Orientation administrators, it might help shape the communication and contacts made with both the students and the parents so the goals of the parent orientation were clear. For example, in the official invitation to orientation, specific goals of the parent orientation could be presented in a way that addressed the concerns of this particular group of parents. In addition, it might be helpful if several of the sessions were scheduled on a Saturday to assist those parents who cannot get time off during the regular work- week.

- It appeared that the students were able, at the beginning of their college career, to key into the financial aid process and not only pursue government aid but also seek private sources of funding. However, a number of the students' scholarship programs decreased the award amount as the students progressed in college. This practice encourages and most often requires the students to work more hours and spend fewer hours on academics. It would be helpful if a more concerted effort was given by Financial Aid counselors to help these students connect with resources that would continue to provide support as they completed their degrees.

<u>Connecting – Relationships</u>

- It was very important to the students in the study to "connect" with their
  professors and instructors. Unfortunately, the students' stories about their
  experiences with teachers were often negative or there simply were no
  connections. As Tinto (1997) suggests, faculty and administrators need to
  consider the experience in the classroom as one of the major factors in college
  student persistence. Tinto points out that persistence and retention efforts are
  often housed in a student affairs division and take on the profiles of special
  programs outside of the classroom, such as study skills, test anxiety counseling,
  special tutoring, and intrusive academic counseling. Unfortunately, at this
  university as in many research universities, undergraduate courses are getting
  larger, and the opportunity to connect with the instructor is minimal. The students
  in the study wanted faculty and instructors to care, take time to explain, know
  their name, relate to students and engage them in learning through activities,
  demonstrations, projects and discussions. Considering the current pressures of
  increased undergraduate enrollments and decreasing budgets and teaching
  resources, I would suggest that administrators and faculty who have direct contact
  with students make the learning experience meaningful for these students in
  environments that do not naturally encourage and support connections with
  professors and instructors. Underlying this concern is the necessity to address the
  administrative and disciplinary support of faculty who are willing to take on a
  challenge associated with undergraduate education within the current tenure and

promotion priorities of a research university and the need to address the inadequate instructional support in terms of faculty positions.

- As noted in the literature and in the findings of this study, peer groups are very important to these students and serve as one of the main ways they connected with the university. Those students who were in established student organizations (athletics and band) and those who lived in the residence halls connected easily with peers. The students who lived at home and commuted found it more difficult to meet their peers. These students noted that the way they met friends was through their classes. However, faculty may feel the purpose of learning in classrooms is not to connect with friends. I would suggest that the learning experience is greatly enhanced if one considers the classroom experience as part of the process of building communities of learners. Learning communities develop through establishing relationships with those engaged in the same learning experience. The result is that learning not only takes place in the classroom but outside of class as the students continue to spend time with one another and share a common learning experience. Faculty and administrators should encourage such community-building within classrooms and note those classrooms where it is currently happening as models for undergraduate learning based on a more insightful interpretation of connecting and community. A report which specifically addresses this point is the document written by the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities titled, Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience (1997). The three main recommendations of the report include: 1) Institutions must become genuine learning communities,

supporting and inspiring faculty, staff, and learners of all kinds. 2) Learning

communities should be student centered, committed to excellence in teaching and

to meeting the legitimate needs of learners, wherever they are, whatever they

need, whenever they need it. 3) Learning communities should emphasize the

importance of a healthy learning environment that provides students, faculty, and

staff with the facilities, support, and resources they need to make this vision a

reality.

- Many of the programs and spaces at the university are designed for the more

  traditional residential student. Six out of the eight student participants commuted

  from home to campus all or part of the time. The specific difficulties they

  associated with commuting were: finding a parking place, finding a place to go in

  between classes on certain parts of campus, being afraid in the evenings to return

  to their car in the dark, needing to return to campus for a group project later in the

  evening, and losing points in class because they were late trying to find a parking

  place or because a highway construction project had caused a traffic jam. These

  types of problems redirect energy that could be spent on learning experiences to

  issues focusing more on logistics. It would be helpful if the actual experience of

  commuter students were considered in light of the logistics of their academic and

  student life. Use of space and implementation of academic and general university

  policies should be examined for their possible negative impact on commuter

  students' experience.

<u>Learning – Hands-on</u>

- The students' stories of learning fell in line with several of the developmental theories reviewed in Chapter Two (Baxter-Magolda, 1992; Chickering and Riesser, 1993). In my experience, relatively few faculty are aware of college student development and learning theories. It appears as though most faculty focus on their individual teaching philosophy or technique rather than the multiple stages in learning or different ways of learning or knowing relative to their students and their particular discipline. When provided with the information, many faculty found it useful as they thought about their teaching. I suggest that such information would be most helpful and have the most impact in seminars particularly for GTA's. These apprentice teachers are generally receptive to information on student learning and how it might impact their approaches to learning and teaching. They have not yet formed a "teaching identity" and intervention at this point might change some early ideas and stereotypical approaches to college teaching and learning.

- Six of the eight student participants had difficulties learning in the biological and physical sciences areas and had to change their major because they could not pass the pre-requisite or co-requisite courses in the sciences. It would be helpful for administrators and faculty to review data on the success of all students in the natural sciences to determine if this is a troublesome area with the general student population or if there are specific student populations that are not successful. Other issues to examine are the different ways of knowing in the scientific disciplines, alternative approaches to teaching that focus on small groups and

teacher/student interaction and the level of science knowledge and preparedness in high school that is necessary for success in the sciences at the university.

- One college at this university took seriously the notion of how faculty learn differently than most of the students they are teaching (Schroeder, 1993). Underlying this particular college's curriculum revision was the belief that there are different ways of learning and knowing, all of which can lead to more complex and integrative learning goals. Starting with the freshman year, student learning experiences now focus on more direct, concrete experience with moderate to high levels of structure, and experiences focus on building learning communities within classes and outside of class through group interaction and projects. Academic affairs administrators in other colleges within the university should encourage faculty to examine undergraduate curricula and learning in a similar fashion – both in general education courses and in major courses. The students in this study consistently mentioned that they learned best when "doing it," when learning "related to the real world," and when learning was "hands-on."

- It was evident from the students' narratives that learning took place in many different environments, not just in the classroom. As was suggested by Astin (1985, 1993) and Kuh (1995), institutions should encourage students to take advantage of existing educational opportunities, many of which are outside of the classroom. I would suggest that within curricular and course requirements, there should be increased opportunities for experiences such as internships, practica, field experiences, service learning, research opportunities, independent studies,

and off-campus study. The students often mentioned that those classes in which they learned the most were the ones in which learning activities associated with the course were also pursued outside of the formal classroom.

- The findings of this study indicate that the students valued experiences where they met and got to know students who were different than themselves. Differences included appearance, speech, ideas and values, religion, ethnicity and race. Learning to appreciate differences was a way they set themselves apart from their home and families – a way that signified growth and a more open mind. Key to this learning was the opportunity to "get to know." The students increased understanding came from the forming of relationships. Within the formal and informal learning structures at the university, there are many opportunities to encourage the building of relationships that support the understanding of diversity. Increased efforts to integrate experiences that encourage an understanding of diversity should be facilitated in classroom teaching and learning, through collaborative class projects, extra-curricular activities and informal gatherings that focus on building community and general university wide programming. In order for such efforts to be successful, there must also be the sense that a diverse learning community built on mutual respect and shared understandings is a valued part of the university culture. At this university, there is a statement on campus diversity written by the Chancellor. Perhaps, there should be a group of students, faculty and administrators who pro-actively seek out those instances on campus where learning activities and programs focusing on diversity are taking place. This group might be given influence and resources

(grants for learning initiatives and programs) to support these efforts and encourage new initiatives.

Major Decision

- As mentioned in the discussion about the students' process of making the Major Decision, the students in this study all traveled through various majors and career choices while at the same time engaging in learning about themselves and the world around them and defining who they might become. A main goal for all undergraduate students is to earn a baccalaureate degree in some discipline. Ideally, learning and activities should contribute to the student's attainment of that goal. The university needs an enrollment management strategy for undergraduate students that would as one its guiding principles, provide a learning environment (from recruiting through graduation) that would support the major decision in the broadest sense. Currently, enrollment management focuses on recruiting and admitting students to the university. I would recommend that a university enrollment strategy team examine student learning and curricula relative to the current student learning, development and persistence theories that address the issues of a diverse and changing student population. Academic affairs, student affairs and student services all play critical roles in degree attainment. An enrollment strategy or plan should be a collaborative effort between these units to build a diverse learning community that supports all students in their major decisions and their ultimate goal of degree attainment.

- Some readers might assume that Major Decision was a more narrow concept involving the student's actual choice of a major along with a possible career and that the persons charged with the responsibility of helping a student do that are academic advisors. The students in this study did consult with advisors with varying results. One student actually defended a poor advising session by acknowledging that one staff advisor was responsible for advising all of the undergraduates in the college and so this advisor could not take the time to really discuss her concerns. Most advising file notes I analyzed consisted of course plans, a summary of what the student was going to enroll in for the next term and an occasional comment about grades, deciding on a major or a referral to another campus resource or department. The students did not see the same advisor every session so most advising sessions were a new encounter, thus making it difficult to build a meaningful relationship. Based on the students' stories, advice and information were also sought from friends, family, other university staff and sources like the Internet or the University Catalog. None of the students talked about advising as a coherent activity that involved exploring, assessing strengths and weaknesses, discussing alternatives, setting goals and evaluation. This university, like most research universities, has academic advising policies, procedures and a structure in place. Relative to good academic planning and advising, a university should assess if students, like the students in this study, are receiving the guidance needed to plan a coherent, meaningful academic plan based on their educational and career goals and if current practices inhibit this process for students and advisors. Other issues to explore include: the value

placed on academic advising as a faculty and/or staff activity and the review of

an institutional advising statement of purpose with specific goals for faculty

advisors, staff advisors and students along with a plan for assessment.

- The findings of this study indicate that curricular structures might encourage or

    discourage students from pursuing certain majors. As was noted, many lower

    division courses serve as entry courses into a discipline rather than an opportunity

    to gain general knowledge. Such structures might cause students to declare majors

    prematurely. Faculty curriculum committees need to assess the general education

    requirements and entry courses to specific majors in order to determine if this is

    having a more widespread effect on student success in particular disciplines and

    the major decision process.

Identity

- Identity is perhaps the most interesting yet most elusive story element to discuss

    in terms of implication for policy and practice. As mentioned previously,

    establishing a sense of identity involves constructing a meaningful story out of

    unintegrated fragments of events and actions. Events and actions are part of what

    constitute the culture of an institution. Culture is also revealed in the espoused

    and enacted values and the core beliefs shared by leaders, faculty, students and

    other constituents such as alumni and parents (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). Based on the

    findings of this study, I would suggest that university administrators and faculty

    consider how the institutional culture (and all that is entailed) contributes to the

    students' developing sense of identity. Are there elements (artifacts, values,

beliefs, behavior) of the institutional culture that actually inhibit or construct barriers to learning and growth, thus making it difficult for students to construct narratives of identity? A systematic cultural analysis, as described by Chaffee & Tierney (1988), Plaut (1983) or Tierney (1990), could serve as a model for this type of assessment.

- The findings of this study indicate that the students, as a result of reflecting on their experiences and telling their stories, articulated a new sense of identity relative to who they were as entering university students. More opportunities for this type of reflection should be integrated into classroom learning (discussions, journals, essays) and in extra-curricular experiences especially in their junior and senior years. Reflecting on their experiences in this way was "eye opening" and led to a more integrated sense of their student identity.

- The students in this study expressed relief when they arrived at a major decision that was interesting and felt like an academic home. At this point, the students connected to their learning in a more meaningful way, academic/career goals were established and a more integrated sense of student identity emerged. The major exploration process was disjointed for most of the students in this study. It would be helpful for undecided students if the university would consider a structured program to assist the students as they moved through exploring majors and careers. A program should include a sustained relationship with an advisor, opportunities to explore the many educational alternatives available to students through course selection and information gathering, opportunities to engage in

certain major/career and personality assessments, values clarification and skill assessment and thoughtful course selection and academic planning.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Future research efforts by educational researchers focusing on student experience should consider the use of narrative inquiry as a method. The purpose of this study was to obtain and analyze stories of the experience of rural, first-generation students from Southern Appalachia at the particular research university in order to understand the connection between their home culture and the university culture and to address the gap in the literature relative to this particular group of students. This study provides data that can assist university faculty, administrators and staff in understanding these students' experiences and how these students made sense of their lives in the context of the university. Narrative inquiry is a valid research method to use when considering the lived experiences of this particular student population.

- Future research efforts could take the findings of this study and determine if the model presented in the meta-narrative might apply to a larger population sample at this same university or to similar populations at other institutions. A combined methods study using both quantitative and qualitative methods would expand the knowledge about this specific population.

- As discussed by Hanson (1998) and Levine & Cureton (1998), college students are very different from those just a few decades ago. Future research should focus on the experiences of these different student groups. This study provides a

narrative research model that could be used with any special group of students in an effort to understand their experiences of being students on any particular university or college campus.

- Future research, using narrative inquiry, should focus on understanding the influence of different minority home/family cultures on college student persistence and on how students learn to negotiate or connect and disconnect between home and institutional cultures. Because stories "as culturally constructed expression are among the most universal means of organizing and articulating experience," narrative inquiry is appropriate when concerned about the larger cultural stories that may be "authoring" students lives or have authoritative power over individual stories.

- As noted by several scholars (Kramp, 1996; Kuh, 1995; Tinto, 1997) more research is needed that focuses on the learning experience of students in the classroom. In this research study, the student participants told many stories about their learning experiences, relationships with teachers and how they learned best. This study presents a model of narrative inquiry that would provide faculty with data that could influence pedagogical decisions. Data focusing on student learning and experience in the classroom might also provide insight into the "student persistence puzzle" as discussed by Tinto (1997).

- The findings of this study suggest that further research is needed on the process of making a major decision and finding an "academic home." The student participants expressed relief and felt connected to the university in a more meaningful way once they made a decision and became involved with the

particular discipline and its faculty. The current literature on student persistence does not address the notion of an "academic home" as an important factor in student success and persistence.

- This research study focused on students who were successful (in good academic standing and enrolled) at the university and it would be helpful if educational researchers, using the same methodology, focused on students who had left the university before attaining their degree. The relationship between home and university cultures could be further explored with those students who had made the decision to leave or who were dismissed for academic reasons.

- Future research on student persistence and success relative to organizational culture should utilize narrative as a method and an object of interpretation in order to understand how students make sense of their lives in the context of the collegiate culture. A number of scholars support the notion that university cultures along with organizational attributes play a role in student persistence and success (Berger and Braxton, 1998; Gibson, 1984; Kuh, 1995; Polyani, in Cortazi, 1993). Polanyi (1993) believes that "oral narratives of personal experience illustrate core concepts of culture and that narratives are sources of insight into those concepts" p. 38). Narrative inquiry then is a methodology "for identifying and investigating beliefs about the world held by members of a particular culture" (p. 39).

Denouement

'It's yours to keep now' –
just as Hamlet says,
'Tell my story' –
There is a continuity from one story to the next;
after the Ilongot have told a story and say
they are giving others the opportunity for
re-telling, for re-tellings are what
culture is about.
Stories may have endings, but
stories are never over.
(Bruner, 1986, p. 17)

This research story is ending, but the stories of the students continue. Maxine was in the other day to request a late withdrawal from class. She had missed a number of morning classes because she was needed at home each morning to care for her elderly aunt until her mother got off work. Lee stopped by to discuss his failing grade in a basic math course and informed me he was being re-tested by Disability Services to determine if his disability affected his performance in the math class. Beth was honored with a scholarship award given to students who have excelled in their academics and whose career goals are to teach in Tennessee. Alice came back for advising, even though she is in a different college. She loves her new major and several weeks ago completed the spring planting on the farm. The stories go on and the students continue to progress, some with more difficulty than others. As an administrator, I found their stories fascinating as they described their experiences to me and disclosed what those experiences meant to them.

From their stories, I learned that their homes and families were a very important part of their identities – as they see themselves now. I saw the University through their eyes and understood more completely how at times their experiences were hard and their

navigation through the university and its bureaucracy was difficult. Listening to their stories, I learned of some caring and dedicated faculty and staff who helped the students make connections and learn. I also heard stories that were exciting, moving and disconcerting – stories about their experiences of being a student at the university along with the interlocking set of larger cultural stories that influenced their telling. As they told their stories, their identities as university students took shape.

It is appropriate at the end of this research story to reconsider Henry Giroux's (1992) comments as quoted in the opening of Chapter One –

> You can't deny that students have experiences and you can't deny
> that these experiences are relevant in the learning process even though
> you might say that these experiences are limited, raw, unfruiful
> or whatever. Students have memories, families, religions, feelings,
> languages and cultures that give them a distinctive voice. We can
> critically engage that experience and we can move beyond it. But
> we can't deny it.
> (p. 17)

The writing of this research story has given the student participants and me, the researcher, the opportunity to critically engage their stories of experience. The stories are now yours – they belong to the reader.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

TELEPHONE SCREENING QUESTIONAIRE

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

TELEPHONE_____

1.   Male_____   Female_____

2.   Have you always been a full-time student while you have been attending UTK?

Yes_____ No_____

3.   What is your major?

_____

4.   Where were you born?

_____Town _____State

5.   Where did you complete seventh grade?

_____Town _____State

6.   Where did you graduate from high school?

_____Town _____State

7.   What was the size of the community in which you spent most of your life before you came to UTK?

A farm_____

Rural area, but not a farm_____

Town less than 2,500_____

Town or city 2,500 – 5,000_____

Town or city 5,000 – 8,000_____

8. Has anyone in your immediate family attended college (parents, brothers or sisters or any other very close relatives)?

    Yes_____   No_____

    If yes, please indicate who attended college. _____

9. Have you ever been married?

    Yes_____   No_____

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

For COLLEGE STUDENTS

Participating in a Qualitative Narrative Study about the

Experience of Being a Rural, First-Generation College Student from Central Appalachia at a University.

You have been invited to participate in a research project about rural, first-generation college students from Central Appalachia and their experiences at a University. The purpose of this study is to obtain and analyze first hand accounts (stories) of the experience of being a first-generation college student from rural, Central Appalachia.

INFORMATION

During this interview, I will be asking you about the experience of being a student at a University. The interview will be audiotaped so that I might listen to your story later as I analyze it. In addition, the interview tapes will be transcribed in text form. These tapes and transcriptions will be kept confidential. The audio tapes will be erased after the transcriptions are complete and the transcriptions will be destroyed after a period of three years. This interview might take about 2 hours. In addition, I would like your permission to review the interview notes in your academic advising file. This file is open to you for review. The advising file contains interview notes and academic plans that might be helpful for purposes of this study.

After I have listened to your stories, we will get together for a second interview to revise or add to the interview data. This second interview might also last about 2 hours. Depending on the information gathered during the interviews, I might ask you to get together a third time to review your story and my analysis. I estimate that the total time spent in the interviews will be 4 to 8 hours. I will be reviewing the interview transcripts, the thematic analysis and the resulting stories with you. This process will ensure that I have not misinterpreted the meaning of what you have said and your perspectives about what is going on. This portion of the study should be complete by October 1998.

Throughout the research process I will use a name of your choice (pseudonym) to protect your identity. I will give you a copy of your story at the conclusion of the project.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may stop at any time without penalty.

RISKS

Risks to the student participants in this study are minimal. No physical or mental discomforts are foreseen. If you become uncomfortable at any time, you may withdraw from the study without penalty.

Participant's Initials_____ (Indicating you have read this page)

BENEFITS

Benefits to the participants include the opportunity for reflection on their experiences at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville and your decision to attend college. In addition, participants may feel personally satisfied in that they are adding to an important body of knowledge, in their own voice, about rural, first generation, Appalachian students.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study. The person transcribing the tapes has signed a pledge of confidentiality.

COMPENSATION

For participating in this study you will receive a $50 dollar gift certificate from the University Book Store.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Ruth A. Darling, at 220 Ayres Hall, and (423) 974-4481. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I understand that I am participating in a research project about the experiences of rural, first-generation college students from Central Appalachia. The information the researcher is gathering will be used to produce a final written analysis. I agree to participate in this project as it has been described. I have received a copy of this consent form and I understand that the consent from will be stored in a secure place at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville until 3 years after the completion of the study.

Participant's Signature_____   Date_____

Investigator's Signature_____   Date_____

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide

Meeting Time_____

Meeting Place_____

Cover Story

I am Ruth Darling, a graduate student in Leadership Studies at UTK. I am doing a study on the experiences of rural, first-generation college students at the University of Tennessee who are from Appalachia. I am doing this study in order to enhance my understanding of student issues and concerns.

This study is my dissertation project. I will use the information in the interviews to identify themes and patterns. All interviews will be taped under an assumed pseudonym or made up name of your choosing. No one except you and me will know your identity. You have my promise of confidentiality and anonymity.

I expect our interview today will take about 2 hours. During a second interview scheduled at a later date, I will ask for your feedback on the actual transcription of this interview and discuss other issues that might arise from our conversation. The second interview may also last approximately 2 hours. Depending on the information obtained in the interviews, I might need to schedule a third interview. I estimate that the total time spent with me will be approximately 4 to 8 hours.

I would like to audiotape our interview. I will later transcribe the tape and use the transcription to complete data analysis. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. No judgement will be made.

Do you have any questions?

Consent form: Review and ask the participant to sign the form. Give the participant his or her own copy of the consent form to keep.

Pseudonym of the
participant_____

Begin tape recording the interview. Review understanding and signing of the consent form.

Interview questions.

_____, Tell me about your experiences as a student at the University of Tennessee?

Sample probes:

How did you decide to come to UTK?

Page 2 (Interview Guide)

Tell me about your first week as a freshman.

Tell me about your freshman year courses.

What was hard?

What worked well?

Tell me about your courses this past year.

What was hard?

What worked well?

Is there anyone who is significant to you here at UTK?

What is different about here and home?

What do you have to do differently here than at home?

What surprised you?

Tell me about where you live.

Tell me about your family.

Who are you close to?

Tell me about your family obligations and how does that fit into school?

NOTES

Thank you for your help today.

VITA

Ruth Darling was born in Wynnewood, Oklahoma on August 22, 1952. She attended schools in the public system of Erie, Pennsylvania where she graduated from Strong Vincent High School in June 1970. She entered Westminster Choir College, Princeton, New Jersey in September of 1970 where in May, 1975 she received the Bachelor of Music degree with music education certification in elementary and secondary education. She entered the Master's Program in Educational Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August of 1975, officially receiving the Master's degree in May, 1977 while working in the Department of Residence Life and continuing with that department until June of 1978. In July of 1978, she accepted the position of Head of Student Services at Knoxville State Technical Institute, Knoxville, Tennessee. From September 1980 through December 1982, she served as Music Education Specialist in the Fulton County School System, Atlanta, Georgia. In October of 1983, she accepted the position of Assistant Director of the Advising Center in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, was promoted to Associate Director in 1986 and to Director of Student Affairs and Advising Services in 1990. In Spring of 1992, she was accepted into the Doctorate of Education Program in Leadership Studies. The doctoral degree was received in August 1999.

She is presently working with undergraduate students and faculty as Director of Student Affairs and Advising Services in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Since 1995, she has served on the Board of Directors for the National Academic Advising Association.