University of Alberta

Enhancing Rural Community Sustainability

through Intergenerational Dialogue

by

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Dedication

For Roderick and my son, Nyctea.

My home is with you.

Abstract

Many rural Alberta communities face critical issues of sustainability including rural-urban migration by youth and young adults. Drawing on research in Alberta, this thesis identifies the factors influencing rural-urban migration and discusses ways of empowering communities. A survey of youth who have left rural communities throughout Alberta, and semi-structured interviews with youth and adults, were conducted to identify these factors. Dialogues (focus groups) involving youth and adults were facilitated in one case study community in east-central Alberta (Kitscoty), to build awareness and a consciousness of key issues of sustainability and resilience. An "intergenerational dialogue framework" is proposed that speaks to the importance of engaging youth and other members of rural communities in discursive processes of issue identification and problem solving. The research findings contribute to our understanding of community sustainability in rural Alberta, indicating that this trend is not inevitable. Many social and environmental factors: 1) A sense of community; 2) social capital; 3) engagement; 4) dialogue; 5) conscientization; 6) an understanding of power and privilege; and 7) attention to context, were said to positively impact youth engagement, and may counter well established pull factors associated with urbanization. The study demonstrates a process of dialogue to bridge generations for effective, authentic communication and to co-create knowledge that can enhance rural education and policy development. The Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue can be applied to other rural communities to strengthen communities with an engaged citizenry.

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This work grew from my own ties the Prairies, a place I still consider to be my rural home. It has been an honour to learn from the experience and knowledge of Dr. Jorge Sousa, my supervisor. I am grateful to Jorge, whose challenging questions, rich perspectives and provocative discussions enriched my experience in graduate studies and this writing. His confidence in me, patience, and sense of timing – from the moment he first rode his bike over to meet me to his vivid diagrams on a white board – have been sources of inspiration and helped me to value the process of learning while I embraced some of the challenges throughout these years. He is always encouraging, and demonstrates his commitment to students as he willingly shares his knowledge and stories from his own journey. Jorge, the time you took to work with me meant everything. To my supervisor and committee members, I am also deeply thankful for valuable insights and encouragement to navigate family, community, and academic life.

This is an opportunity for me to express my gratitude for supportive conversations, challenging questions, and a belief in the importance of this work. Thank you to my committee members for their generous contributions of time and expertise in rural research, education, and community development. I appreciate the evocative writing of Dr. Roger Epp, whose essays spurred me to continue to write. I value the constructive feedback he shared, and the way of viewing 'rural' as both geography and a culture all its own. Thanks to Dr. Brenda Parlee for challenging me to pause and consider what is new and important about a framework for intergenerational dialogue, and the unique knowledge I am able to contribute to this field. Dr. Bonnie Watt-Malcolm, your own rural-urban story and point of view continue to inspire me. I often mark your words, and "watch for the open doors". Dr. Michael Corbett, I was honoured that you took the time to speak with me about your work, and to read my thesis. I appreciate your commitment to rural youth migration and teaching educators about what it means to live and work in rural areas. I see in your career a model of how I would like to teach. You have provided me with advice and reinforced the value of continuing this research.

I am thankful for the privilege of working on a research project with Jorge in my first year of my program, and the encouragement to teach, write, and share my findings. In the final years of my doctoral studies, I also had the opportunity to contribute to two research projects with Dr. Alison Taylor. To each of you, thank you for the opportunity to write together, to present our work, and most importantly, for modelling for me the type of mentorship I wish for the younger generation of rural youth.

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My family and siblings understand what it means to grow up in a rural community, what it feels like to leave, and the potential for return. In this

dissertation I write about sense of community, rural identity, and belonging. To my father, Jacob, and my mother, Bonny, I trust that you see how the value you place on relationships and community continue to be played forward in my own life. I express my gratitude to each of my siblings, Lyndsey, Jill, Dori, and Sue and their life partners, and to my nieces Austyn and Chynna - no, you do not have to call me "Dr. Aunty Zane." My sister Sue Johnstone has helped me in personal and professional ways. She has read and edited my writing, and shown me how to be brave while we hold on to what we value from our rural roots – music, kindness, native pasture land. For this understanding, I thank you.

Like many of the respondents who speak about their experiences in this dissertation, family and the "social fabric" are what bring me back home. To each of the participants who shared their experiences with me, I am beholden. Your generosity and trust in me continues to fuel my dedication to this work. The "sense of community" and belonging you speak about is what I was trying to voice all along. Thank you for sharing the two threads with the biggest impact on staying and return - family and the land- and your stories that express these bonds. These are the moments when all I can do is hold my breath and listen. I will honour your stories by continuing to learn across generations, and like some of you, I hope to maintain a place and connection to community in both worlds.

Finally, Roderick, thank you for just "getting it" listening to my ideas, and inhaling this life we have chosen with vigour. To Grandpa Glen, farming in Chailey since age 16, I love the courage and grace with which you embrace rural life and the memories you pass to the next generation. My son, Nyctea, what a gift and ultimate challenge to welcome you into our world during the writing of this thesis. You've shown me how to engage while you run headlong into the messiness of baby donkeys, community meetings, and riding on tractors with uncles and grandparents who will tell you about their lives. Most of all, thanks for bringing me fully into the present, letting me know "if you want me, I am right here." You have taught me that there are times when everything else can wait.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

For a long time I have been interested in following the paths that rural youth pursue, and exploring how they perceive their choices to leave, stay, relocate or return to their communities. Their choices, although personal, have long-term implications for many aspects of community sustainability, including community assets, systems, and structures. The three objectives of my research are: a) to understand the factors that impact rural out-migration and potential for return to rural communities; b) to explore how rural communities promote or limit youth participation; and c) to build a framework for intergenerational dialogue in order to understand the complexity of issues such as youth migration, and to explore rural alternatives and potential solutions. My contribution is to test a process of dialogue between generations in one rural community to demonstrate the validity of knowledge shared by youth and adults. broadening the research scope to include topics such as mentorship, educational processes, and building intergenerational linkages in other contexts or rural communities. I intend to demonstrate this process of learning between youth and adults and share these findings with rural community stakeholders to inform education policy and support sustainable rural communities.

With these objectives in mind, I wondered going into the research, what kinds of factors, including social context and human interactions, environmental and geographic factors, and economic conditions, might limit or offset the increasing and constant pattern of rural to urban migration typical of so many rural communities. To meet my objectives, I chose to conduct dialogues in Kitscoty, a rural community in east-central Alberta that is facing some of these pressures.

The first objective of my research was to determine what factors influence rural-urban migration and consequently the sustainability of rural communities. By sustainability I mean rural community development that best meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 1987). Rural communities are made up of distinctive social, cultural and environmental factors, with local assets and challenges that impact the lives of community members. These factors include social factors, such as family

connections and history, peers, educators and community members, and membership in sports, drama, music, clubs, and church. The factors that may impact migration also include environmental and geographical factors such as ties to land, a sense of space, and place, or proximity to a larger centre. Cultural factors can include the ethnocultural diversity (or lack of diversity) in the community, with important considerations such as language or numbers of visible minorities or Aboriginal members, as well as a sense of being part of a rural 'culture' that I discuss later in the thesis. Economic factors may include availability of local employment, cost of housing and resources available in the community. I believe that individuals' lived experiences can be understood as they are shared through stories or their narratives about their community (Van Manen, 1990; Clandinin and Connelly, (2000); Vella, 2004). These shared life stories and community memories are shaped by the interconnections of social, familial, cultural, political, educational and geographical terrain, and can have a profound impact on rural community members and rural community development. They may shape the extent to which community members feel a sense of belonging or connection to the people and rural place, how these community members understand the rural context, and how they find their place in the world. This research is more than analysis and interpretations, however, valuable as these might be. Through this study, I sought to develop a process that would facilitate greater understanding of these stories; in the text of the thesis; consequently, we hear the voices of rural community members and young people formerly from rural areas. These stories have implications beyond the immediate individual and community. The ways that leaders, government academics and others interpret and act on these experiences have long-term impacts on rural community sustainability.

As observed by rural community stakeholders in recent discussions about the structures of rural communities and how to engage rural youth in rural community life, it is clear that there is a need to understand how to retain or re-attract youth to rural communities in Alberta (Alberta Rural Development Network, 2011). For the purpose of this thesis, I define youth as young people aged 18-30, extending to the upper age limit of youth as defined by Service Canada (2008). However, the ambiguity of what we term "youth" is a key challenge in identifying solutions to

local issues. Over the course of this study, I recognized that youth is more often defined by decisions and choices during a stage or phase of life and is not limited to age, and participants who self-identified as youth in the dialogue ranged from early 20s to early 30s. With this fluid nature of youth in mind, it would be interesting to involve younger participants who are still in high school and in the process of thinking about their options, but I chose to include youth over the age of 18 to ensure that they are the age of legal consent, and extended it to early 30s to understand a range of mobility factors at various stages of young people's lives.

According to the Commonwealth Secretariat (2005) and Alberta Rural Development Network in recent discussions about rural and remote community sustainability and planning, involving government organizations, it was noted that the younger generation is regarded as essential to build vibrant rural communities. These facts highlight the prevalent gap in input from the next generation of community leaders if an entire generation is absent from the discussions about future planning that impacts their community. It is clear that if this next generation is critical to rural and remote community leadership and succession planning, they need to be present in the discussions and decision-making about the future of their community (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005). The opinions and experiences of rural youth are vital to plan relevant education and community development programs and policy.

A second focus of my study is methodological. The research was not only done for academic outcomes but to create a process of learning with, in and for the individuals and community involved. Building rural communities that provide tangible options for youth is the focus of my research. With this in mind, in addition to social and environmental factors that may counter rural youth out-migration, I believe that there is a need to speak with youth and adult leaders and mentors (non-formal leaders) from rural communities to investigate their perceptions, assumptions, and theories about the issues. This is important to understand the issue of youth leaving, and also the ways in which the community may support their decisions and foster a sense of rural identity across generations. Rural identity in this thesis refers to a sense of shared history and belonging to a community and a place, and a connection or commitment to contributing to a rural area. This support may involve

encouraging youth to stay, supporting their choices to explore their options, and to maintain connections so that they are able and welcome to return after exploration. It may also mean that community members help to foster a sense of rural identity in youth, but help prepare them for life outside the community if they leave. Supporting a range of options for rural youth may include encouraging them to pursue post-secondary education or work outside of the community, while building opportunities that make it possible for them to return to live and work in the rural community.

While this thesis examines the impacts of rural out-migration on the sustainability of rural communities, including closures of community schools, health centers, and loss of a diverse economic base (Epp and Whitson, 2001), the long-term objective of my research is to identify factors that influence patterns of youth migration and the ways to engage youth and adults to understand and potentially counter this migration. To do this, I re-conceptualize rural communities and learn from community members to enhance connections that include dialogue between rural youth and adults. In what ways might we understand the factors that influence migration through what I refer to as intergenerational dialogue, including mentorship between youth and an experienced generation of community adults or leaders? I propose that developing a youth-adult mentorship process is necessary because it serves to build networks and it strengthens resiliency (Fletcher, 2009). In the following section I discuss the importance of connections between generations.

I believe that an intergenerational dialogue framework may support connections between youth and adults to build stronger communities on three distinct levels; 1) It serves to understand and potentially counter the problem of rural youth out-migration and the impact this has on local community infrastructure, and sectors such as agriculture and food production; 2) It provides a means to explore ways to encourage youth to stay in or return to rural communities and find supports for the choices that they are making; and 3) It contributes to strengthening sustainable rural communities where youth and adults are part of an engaged citizenry with public policy influence and decision-making power. Decision-making for and about rural areas often takes place in an urban setting with an urban perspective in mind. This is often perceived as a key problem. A more appropriate response is community-based

organizing with broad supports. For example community groups may work with government facilitation, without government dictating what should be done in rural areas (Fairbairn, 2008). A dialogue between youth and adults creates space for adults learning from youth and youth learning from adults in these rural areas, and to consider alternatives to leaving the community. There is a recognition and legitimacy of voices that cuts across generations, and contributes to a broader understanding of the complexity of the issues and the implications of various choices. Communication between the generations creates a space to tease apart some of the more complex issues tied to mobility, and examine how various phenomena such as migration may change over time or in different contexts. My interest in this work starts with my own rural roots.

Personal and Social Position in this Research

My background has been a key influence in my decision to explore this research theme. I grew up on a family farm near a small rural agricultural community in Saskatchewan. Through my personal and academic work I focus my attention on individual and collective connections to land, regional food systems, and community. This thesis builds on my own position as a former rural young person and educator negotiating my own identity between rural and urban realities. Situating myself as the researcher in this work is necessary because my belief in the importance of rural communities is part of my motivation to conduct this research, and may impact assumptions I have about outmigration and rural communities. I am currently living in an urban setting, reflecting on strong ties to my own rural history, Mennonite Brethren roots, and connection to the land and family farm.

My earliest recollections that motivate me to engage in rural community research are of being included in the cycles of planting, harvest, and interconnectedness with the seasons and community life. Learning to garden and grow food with my grandmother and mother contributed to my commitment to intergenerational learning and mentorship, while being part of an international custom grain harvesting organization working with local farmers and families continues to be foundational to my understanding of what it means to feel a

responsibility to land and with/in a community. In part, my role as a young person that included mentorship, researching and sharing resources with youth, is one which I carry with me into the present, and fuels my interest in conducting this research.

Through my work experience coordinating a rural development educational exchange, I had the opportunity to reflect and analyze my own experiences and learn from the perspectives of rural youth and community members, including formal leaders (for example, teachers, 4-H Leaders, coaches, town council members, or those with formal roles in local government) and informal or non-formal community leaders. These leaders may include people in the community without a formal title, but to whom local community members look to for leadership. Informed by key lessons learned in working with nonformal education programs in rural communities, I am interested in exploring the ways in which youth may be included in all aspects of community life and decision making. By understanding how intergenerational connections and nonformal learning occurs in rural communities, I aim to understand factors that may impact youth engagement, and how communication occurs between generations. Dialogue with community members of a variety of ages adds insight into what ways these factors enhance or inhibit participation in the daily economic, social, political and cultural life in their rural community. It adds to our understanding of what policies and practices might make it possible for a younger generation to choose to stay.

As an educator and researcher with experience living and working in rural communities in diverse cultural and socioeconomic settings, including Canada, and internationally, I am uniquely positioned to communicate the long-term social, economic, educational and cultural impacts of this research. I have lived in rural communities and mentored rural youth and educators. I intend to work with those who are struggling with choices to leave, stay or return, and communities experiencing the negative consequences of a decreasing youth population.

My research is intended to encourage new ways of understanding and responding to rural youth migration and out-migration. My epistemological perspective recognizes that rural communities are diverse, and I will challenge

assumptions of how a rural reality is constructed by different actors, including myself. I believe in the importance of recognizing that knowledge is generated locally, which is an integral step toward realizing the benefit of intergenerational dialogues. It is within these dialogues that theories are co-created from 'lived experiences' and local knowledge and solutions are honoured.

This study is more than a matter of personal interest, affinity, and values. I left my community in rural Saskatchewan for a cornucopia of reasons that might be most accurately synthesized as an attempt to construct my own identity as an individual as well as part of the collective. This identity includes a strong rural core, but an adaptability that is also well-suited to intercultural environments and urban living. My own pattern of mobility and migration started with my family. From the year I was born until age 18, my family travelled through the USA as grain harvesters. For three months every summer we lived in trailer houses, a converted school bus, hotels, and on farmers' ranches, harvesting grain and moving from town to town. This early exposure to times of drought, and boom crops so prevalent in agricultural communities, increased my exposure to these systems that shape and define rural prairie character. I gained a unique outsider/insider perspective on different rural communities making social connections through the local libraries, laundromats, swimming pools, local events like rodeos and tourist attractions, and exploring the communities on my bike. These connections were important in recognizing the community assets and challenges I discuss in this study.

A sense of community, attachment and belonging are key aspects of my rural experience and shaped my identity. As part of a large family, I was raised with a consistent eye on "what is best for family and community." This orientation to the broader community continues to be central tenet in how I connect with my surroundings no matter where I choose to live. However, I could not live in my rural community uncensored. I left to leave the stage, in a way, and to find my own place on my own terms. Growing up in rural community, with a family and networks that are well-established, brings certain expectations and limitations that I embrace and resist. I left primarily to be able to speak honestly and to explore, although two other key components mentioned often in the literature – education and employment –

were only available in larger centres more than 2-3 hours away from our farm. The isolated location in south western Saskatchewan presented a very different context than rural Alberta communities on a main corridor, with close access to a larger centre. At the time that I left, on-line learning or distance education was not an option, though the social adventuring and connecting in person would have drawn me away. My perception was that in order to succeed on my own terms, I had to leave.

The tensions and challenges in rural communities are as complex as the factors to consider for potential return. There are expectations around faith, participating in certain events or sports, and even expectation about social decorum or sexual orientation. There are real challenges for young people to be in any way different. A lack of diversity in my own rural hometown weighs in heavily as a reason that I left, and a reason that I have not returned. However, families and adult mentors can play key roles in engaging a younger generation. Some of my most powerful memories of growing up are of volunteering together with adults at local events and leadership roles for younger "youth". My own high school experience included key roles in sports, drama, and student governance. On trips home during my first years of university I was whipped into roles as "Mary" in the major Christmas pageant productions, or volunteered in any community event that happened to coincide with my visit. There was a place for me there – if I chose to engage in acceptable ways.

My own experience of leaving helps me to understand how and why youth might leave rural communities, and think about factors that contribute to youth engagement and participation in rural life. Despite a certain ease and ability to move across what I understood as a very strong division between "insiders" (prominent church families) and "outsiders" (everyone else), these community dynamics were troubling to me. I longed to be "known and understood" as an individual, not just part of a family or a collective, and to offer that to others. In my home town, an acceptable way to leave was to become a missionary, attend a Christian College, or maybe find my way to university. My current interest in mentorship and supporting youth in career development stems in part from my own experience struggling to weigh options. I share my pathway with the hope to

illuminate some of the complex messages that youth receive - reasons why we might leave a rural community and choose to return – or not.

Similar to some of the interviews I highlight later on, I still call rural Saskatchewan, and more specifically the farm – "home". History, the land, and family are my connecting points there. I can slide easily into rural life and I know everyone in the town. Yet there are ways of creating community wherever you are, looking at opportunity to understand the pressures and opportunities in each new setting. My previous work in other rural communities in Canada, USA, Malawi and Colombia provided insight into the varying dynamics that shape rural people and spaces. These insights were helpful and necessarily muddied my sense of rural community development. My time working in rural Malawi my first year out of high school was instrumental in showing me the importance of women's work in building community, and the vital role of local agriculture, health care, and schools. In the dialogues in Kitscoty, I have drawn on these experiences to 'unlearn' some of my assumptions about rural areas. Most notable was the prominence of natural resources and a thriving economy that includes a role for youth in the oil industry. Oil and natural gas augment the local farm income and regional post-secondary schools create options for youth to study and work in the community.

Reasons that I might choose to return are equally complex. Like many rural youth who moved to urban settings, aging parents and care for other siblings are a key reason that I will return for a period of time. For years I dreamed of converting my Grandmother's homestead into a youth dinner theatre similar to Rosebud, Alberta. My imagination was fuelled with the image of the big red barn and in theory I had the grant writing skills, theatre background, and business savvy to succeed. However, for many of the reasons that rural youth face, I am not convinced that I can live in my rural home community now. Realistically, a project of that nature would be both supported and judged. I would consider another rural community, perhaps uncharted in terms of my own role within it.

There is a lot more to this story. In the voices of rural participants you will hear the tensions - sadness and loss, or willingness or reluctance to let it go, a joy at

returning, or falling somewhere in between. Like many of the research participants who shared their experiences in my study, this background continues to influence how I orient myself in the present. Several examples come to mind.   During the course of this research I made the choice to buy some of the land that my parents farm. As in many parts of the world, there are few young farmers to take over, so land is now sold to agri-business, those who make their home elsewhere but fund the farm land with their work in the oil and gas industry, or communal farmers who do not live in the community, such as the Hutterites, or those with rural roots currently living in urban areas. A challenge in rural areas, also noted in this study, is the significant environmental footprint it requires to live there. The farm where I grew up is a different world than the rural communities in parts of Alberta, where I am living now. There is oil and gas that helps to fuel (in all ways) the local farms, which has completely changed the face of farming. Many work off-farm, too. Rural youth face dilemmas on both sides of the choices to live on the land or make their home elsewhere. Some, like us, are trying to balance the romantic ideal of the "rural" with the reality of what it means to love a family, a landscape, and a life that, like most, is riddled with contradiction.

Profound experiences growing up in a rural community contribute to a "rural identity" and consciousness. In a similar vein, I still consider rural as central to my identity. My shelves are lined with books on beekeeping. Elevators were the image I chose for a cyanotype this past autumn. This old blueprint photography process fades over time, an irony that is not lost on me. I write in the Heritage Room of the public library, surrounded by titles as seemingly maudlin as "Hills of Hope: Next Generation"; "Harvest of Memories"; "Our Crossroads" "Our Treasured Roots" "Oxen Tales to Jet Trails" "Hardships and Happiness" "Medicine Madams and Mounties", "Lure of the Homesteader" or in the chaos and shrill tales of youth who have found- between the stacks of books - a place to rest. I hear them talk about who has left the reserve or small town, who will return for the summer, who is pregnant and homeless. I hear telephone calls to northern Alberta for potential employment in the oil field, and wonder what it means when one tells another to "go back where you came from". I notice that cell phone or public

library computer access to Facebook is how some youth are staying in touch with small town high school friends. It is one of the few genuinely public (and warm) spaces in the core of the city. This may be a fragmented community, but it reveals a more nuanced view of youth mobility and rural life that is full and complex.

For most of my adult years I have struggled to find a sense of community and simplify the questions of leaving, returning, or living between my rural home and "away". Through the course of this research it is clearer to me that I carry piece of Prairie in my pocket wherever I go. This spring I took a group of young children who had never left the city out to Tofield, Alberta for the annual Snow Goose field trip. The big yellow school bus parked at the side of the gravel back road. Instead of lining up to view the birds through microscopes as instructed, the gaggle of kids ran headlong like a wayward kite through the ditches and under the barbed wire fence, hands digging into the mud and swooping hands skyward. Their voices were clear, even as their feet sank into the rich muddy soil, "We found a field!"

This pure joy in experiencing nature first-hand, and sharing that experience with others, is evident in the memories of growing up in rural spaces. This rural truth is the one I know, and yet it exists in part as mythology. Despite economic and social struggle, the landscape and sheer breadth of the living sky are concrete evidence of the power of this place, if far from quantifiable. I respond to the voices of the participants in this study even as they fall on one side of fence of potential for return: "that's the only home I know", or the other – "there is no 'home' to return, now", and even more frequently, struggling with a space somewhere in between. The stories of searching and loss stand out in my mind. These are evidence of a world which may be threatened by political and economic pressures, but remains because of the people who have chosen to resist and push back as they call these rural places home. They are sustained by members who value this way of life, speak this language with pride, and with determination to live on the land with both a gentleness and fierce intensity. Somewhere between the silence of the rural spaces and the spring wakening there is something important, but broken. A long river valley runs through these landscapes, and the bridge between is tenuous. This portrait of rural life is the "living myth" that Moira Johnston (1983) speaks about, a

place where history scrapes up against technology, romantic ideals meet shocking, tough reality. The purpose of this dissertation is not to simplify these experiences, but a challenge to hold that gaze.

Purpose of the Research

A growing body of literature calls for education policy with a rural focus that supports participation and partnerships, specifically engaging youth, to build healthy rural communities (Vanclief and Mitchell, 2000; Sherman and Sage, 2011; Azano, 2011). For example, the Alberta Government Rural Development Strategy (2004) and A place to grow (2007) outlines Alberta's policy commitments to rural communities. Until now, there has been a lack of research and policy development in this area. My research seeks to address this gap by developing an intergenerational framework for rural community dialogue. It demonstrates the need for mentorship and responds to this need by encouraging learning between generations.

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and possible responses to youth outmigration. I explore the reasons youth choose to stay or return to a rural community, and why they leave, and extend this exploration by connecting generations to explore the context, drivers, and playing field that shape rural communities. Designing and facilitating a dialogue that includes both adults and youth, serves to unpack and explore these experiences, and gain a richer, more complex understanding of why these rural people and places matter and how youth and adults might be engaged in making decisions that impact their future. My goal is to create a community development framework that places intergenerational dialogue at the core of the issues and processes that influence youth migration and mobility. To that end, I will apply an interpretive lens as I explore my research questions. By examining factors that may counter increasing patterns of out-migration of youth from rural communities, and connecting this theory with educational policy and practice, the aim is to make a long-term contribution to rural policy development. The starting point for this exploration is the question: Can an intergenerational dialogue lead to a better understanding of these issues, and a better understanding of possible solutions? As I mentioned previously, my objectives include exploring the

issue together with rural community members, and developing a framework for dialogue between youth and adults. The framework for intergenerational dialogue can then be applied to strengthen and support other rural communities that are interested in communicating across generations to share local knowledge and engage with local issues. In this study, I explore the potential for dialogue by testing the process with one specific community, and then consider how dialogue may be applied to other communities facing similar challenges. The "big picture" application of this thesis, and my contribution, is to demonstrate the process of dialogue and how it might be used to engage youth and adults as it is applied to explore and deepen our understanding of issues like youth migration.

There is value in applying an intergenerational framework that supports intergenerational learning to understand rural migration patterns, and counter migration from rural areas by promoting healthy, sustainable community development practices and structures. My research is strengthened by a valuable network of youth and adults to share ideas about how to develop mentorship support a younger generation to engage and participate in rural communities, and other strategies that have long-term potential to counter rural out-migration. Active participation in rural communities is critical for engaging future generations (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000; Huckle and Sterling 2001), and recent provincial policy in Alberta supports youth engagement and rural community development (Alberta Government, Rural Development Strategy, 2004; A place to grow, 2007). I turn now to the how this dissertation is organized.

Overview of Chapters

Including this introductory chapter, this thesis is comprised of eight chapters. My second chapter provides an overview to situate this research in a historical and global context. In this chapter I provide insight on what it is like to live in a rural community, and explore the idea of *rural identity*. I focus on the problem, provide evidence to substantiate the claim that these issues are exacerbated by rural out-migration, and ultimately present a case for why the rural areas matter in a local and regional context. In the final section of this chapter, I profile Kitscoty, Alberta, in

which I will be conducting my research dialogues. In a subsequent chapter I provide a more thorough description of this rural community from my observations in the field.

The theoretical foundations supporting this research will be outlined in the third chapter. First, I provide an overview of some key concepts in social theory, as they relate to democratic process and political skills in rural communities, for example, power, privilege and agency. An understanding of the literature on community development provides a foundation for exploring how the problem of rural out-migration has been addressed, and a starting point for analysis of the strengths and limitations of previous work in this field. I follow this section with a theoretical discussion about the concepts of sense of community and social capital and their relevance to rural community networks. This chapter provides a context and framework for the social, economic, environmental/geographic, cultural, and global "factors" that impact rural communities, and are key elements of my research questions. These elements are fundamental starting points from which to identify and explore the challenges, assets, and possibilities within rural communities

The second part of chapter three provides theoretical grounding for using dialogue. I demonstrate why dialogue is an important process in community development for rural communities seeking local solutions to issues such as rural youth migration. The latter part of this chapter highlights literature on perspectives and theories of adult education, engagement, conscientization, and dialogue. A discussion of the concepts and process of dialogue and youth engagement demonstrates the importance of dialogue when the goal is to engage with community members and learn from their experiences. This foundational chapter highlights the importance of understanding power and privilege (voice, identity, and belonging). The last part of this chapter lays the conceptual foundation and describes the critical elements that shape this research. I apply the theories to my research and the rural community context as I conceptualize the elements and the process of dialogue. The conceptual foundation I develop forms the basis from which I ask my research questions.

In Chapter 4, the Methodology and Epistemological Considerations, I describe my research methods, the rationale for community selection, and ethical considerations. The final chapters contain the results, analysis, and application to theory and practice. In Chapter 5, I summarize and explore the results from the survey and in-depth interviews and how they inform the dialogues, and I interpret the findings using the elements of the conceptual framework I developed. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the process of dialogue that is unique to the community context. Chapter 6 explores the process of setting up dialogues between youth and adults, as I reflect on my dual roles as a researcher, and on the challenges of working in a rural community. I describe the dialogue process and the findings from the dialogues, and relate these findings back to my conceptual framework. In Chapter 7, I develop a framework for intergenerational dialogue by describing the elements from theory and practice and demonstrating how they are applied to a dialogue between adults and youth. I conclude with Chapter 8, in which I discuss implications for policy and practice in the fields of adult learning and rural education, rural community development, and public policy. In this chapter I also identify potential areas for future research. I now begin with the rural context.

Throughout this dissertation I use specific terms. The following concepts are defined in Appendix A: assets, mobility and migration, out-migration, sustainability, community health, rural, rural community development, youth, adult leaders or mentors, social networks, engagement, factors, including social, economic, educational, environmental, political and geographical factors, community development, rural development, social capital, sense of place, intergenerational, and intergenerational framework. While brief definitions are offered in the glossary, these terms, as well as the concepts of messages and youth engagement, are explored in more detail within the literature review and methods chapter.

Chapter 2 – Exploring What informs a Rural Identity

In this chapter I develop an argument and provide evidence for why rural areas matter. First, I include a background section to situate rural youth migration in a both a broad and local context. I emphasize the importance of understanding rural history that demonstrates the power of tradition, stories, and rural connections that had significant impacts in the past. Rapid resource development, population growth and decline, and social and environmental factors have all had significant impacts on rural decline. In this chapter, I synthesize and critique the key issues identified in the literature as detrimental to rural communities, highlighting the urgent response needed at a local level. Through an analysis of what is particular to Alberta, and how this has changed over time, I situate the discussion in a broader rural history and context. Finally, I extend the discussion to include how this research responds to a call for action to understand and address rural out-migration by strengthening local rural community resiliency, and emphasize the importance of understanding the impact of youth migration and engagement on rural communities.

The purpose of this chapter is to set the stage for the survey and interviews by demonstrating the rich and complex history of Alberta and the multitude of current pressures on rural areas. In addition to the demographic trends toward urbanization, there are socio-economic factors such as resource dependency and restructuring; environmental concerns eroding connections to the land; and factors which impact social and cultural life of rural communities such as youth out-migration, loss of family connections or shared histories, and strong influences of growing urban communities.

Community Sustainability, Rural Migration and Resilience

My research builds upon a growing body of knowledge that problematizes the occurrence of rural youth migration by focusing on the impact of out-migration on the social, economic, and environmental aspects that impact rural community sustainability. Research focused on youth aged 15 to 29 indicates that out-migration from rural or small town communities having populations of less than 10,000 will persist or accelerate (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002) . Between 2001 and 2006,

approximately 28% of the youth population (15-19 years) migrated out of rural Canada. In the most rural and remote areas (excluding the territories), 34% of youth out-migrated between 2001 and 2006 (Government of Canada Rural Secretariat Community Data Base, 2011). Rural Canada's population is generally older (median age 42.1) than the population of urban Canada (with a median age of 38.9). More than 55% of youth are moving to urban centers, while only 37% (1 in 3) plans to return to a rural community (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002). Those who choose to remain in cities point to limited economic and social opportunities in rural settings (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002). In exploring the issue of rural out-migration in Alberta, it is vital to understand the broader context as, and to situate the issue in the context of rural community development, examining what has been done in the past by rural communities to sustain themselves (for example, establishing cooperatives, farmers' unions, schools and health facilities).

The unique "Albertan" reality has been explained with specific examples of how rural communities are negatively affected by rural out-migration, including the loss of the family farm and services such as schools and health centers (Epp and Whitson, 2001). There are critical issues that extend beyond these losses, however. The decline of a local workforce and tax base has profound implications for the future of rural areas (Alberta Education, 2006, Planting the Seeds, Rural Education and Growth in Alberta). To understand the scope and scale of the problem of rural out-migration, and to gain a profound sense of why rural spaces matter, I begin with a description of the issues. Key issues include, but are not limited to, economic viability. The key pressures also include infrastructure, loss of services or limited access to services such as health care, access to relevant education, access to technology such as internet, and environmental concerns. To begin, economic viability in a rural community includes jobs that provide financial stability and satisfying employment or work, opportunities for education and training for these jobs, and access to these opportunities. Often assumptions are made about why people leave and return, and employment is frequently named as a critical factor in out-migration or potential to return. In the following section, I demonstrate that a desire to stay, leave, or return to a rural community extends beyond economic factors.

Rural economy and infrastructure are often the most visible indicators of how a rural community is doing. Loss of local agriculture and other rural businesses comes at a social and economic cost, including losses of social services (Epp, 2001) and social "fabric" or networks, and additional costs of commuting to larger urban centers. Many myths prevail that assume rural communities and small towns cannot compete in the global economy, or are too small or rural to have a viable future (Caldwell, 2008). Rural and urban economies and markets are interdependent. A broad-based economic development approach with a focus on entrepreneurship can and does support local businesses, and a thriving rural infrastructure is essential for rural and urban markets (Caldwell, 2008). However, losses to rural infrastructure have a deep social and economic effect on rural communities, and profound impacts for the next generation, especially youth.

The economic perspective alone does not provide a complete portrait of the importance of maintaining rural livelihood and vibrant rural communities. It is critical to expand the discussion to a broader context that includes the historical richness of rural areas in Alberta. This expanded view includes the importance of local food systems, farmers' markets, and food production, and the power of learning from knowledge generated through locally-based organizing combined with academic supports (Nord, 2000; Friedland, 2010). Freidman (2010) recognizes the importance of reducing inequality in rural communities through political and social participation. However, rural communities are not without tensions and contradictions. For example, some Albertan farmers or landowners are faced with choices about whether or not to have an oil pump (pump jack) on their land. The income generated through oil provides revenue to offset the high price of farming, but it comes with an environmental and agricultural cost. As I describe in the following sections, many rural community members demonstrate a deep-rooted commitment to environmental stewardship, and personal and political will to strengthen communities in rural areas. Despite this commitment to strengthen the community, rural areas are still facing loss. I turn now to the ways in which rural population decline is an issue recognized on local and provincial levels, especially the loss of youth in rural communities.

Rural out-migration, particularly rural youth out-migration, is a serious policy issue (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002). People living in urban centers often ask why rural areas matter, and wonder what is wrong with a concentration of people living in urban settings. Maybe, they speculate, it would be better for all people to live in urban centers and stop funding initiatives to maintain dying rural areas. The out-migration of youth from rural communities is a concern to rural community members and to policy makers interested in issues of education policy, rural sustainability and rural economic development (Corbett, 2007; Looker, 2001; Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002). Interdependence between rural and urban areas may also be a factor to consider as part of a longer-term strategy.

First, to demonstrate the challenges facing rural Alberta, I draw on the work of Alberta Community and Co-operative Association (ACCA) and McNaughton (2006), and the policy document *Rural Alberta: Land of Opportunity* (2004). As McNaughton and ACCA accounts (2006) emphasize, Alberta is facing a decline in rural social structure and leadership including human resources and social infrastructure. Youth and skilled professionals are leaving rural communities. With a declining population, many services that support economic and community development, such as cultural programs, are dwindling.

As previously mentioned, schools and health facilities face this decline, and along with the school closures, many recreational and sports opportunities are lost. Physical infrastructure such as roads, transportation services, and public buildings, water treatment and facilities may no longer be affordable, or are not accessible or adequate. Further, local business and economy are less resilient and therefore more vulnerable to extreme shifts or crises when other aspects of the community are threatened. For example, with decline in population the tax base decreases, and there is a shortage of labour and consumers to support the local economy. A declining population also has an impact on land use and environment. With fewer young people taking over family farms, there is a loss of smaller-scale agriculture and in some cases, decline in local ownership. Environmental stewardship and nature resource protection are also crucial issues. People in rural areas often are the major

stewards of the land, and may have in-depth knowledge of the local resources and environment.

Other issues noted by the non-profit sector are the challenge in attracting volunteers for community organizations and events, and a need for leadership capacity in rural areas to be renewed through support and training (Alberta Community Cooperative Association and McNaughton, 2006). While there are opportunities for diversification and training in rural communities, a major barrier is the difficulty in accessing technology or financing, or the necessary skills and resources. While the Alberta government has expressed a policy commitment to preserve rural culture, heritage, and quality of life, with rural development initiative funding to complement local social and economic initiatives, the ACCA (2006) confirms that there is a growing concern among rural Albertans that government funding, policies and regulations do not recognize the diversity of rural areas and their unique circumstances. In addition, it is challenging to have local concerns heard at the provincial level.

Local rural community members' concerns about having their voices heard and their unique communities and interests recognized are consistent with observations by policy scholars (Atkinson and Coleman, 1992) that certain capacities, including access to information and technology, are often crucial to effective participation, thus excluding members who do not possess expertise or privileged relationships (p. 157). Further, Ching and Creed (1997) offer insight into the ways that rural identity is developed, who is able to participate, and how this is shaped by the hierarchy of rural community life. The question of who has the power or authority to participate in civic life is central to my research that intends to question youth and adult participation in the processes and decisions that impact their rural communities. Relationships and networks, or what Atkinson and Coleman (1992) refer to as "policy networks" and "policy community" (p.157) are crucial. The need to work in partnerships between rural community members, social economy networks, government, and industry is even more critical in rural contexts. A current example of this policy is the Alberta government commitment to rural initiatives and their stated interest in discussions with rural youth (see for example *Rural Alberta: Land of Opportunity*, 2004).

The profound challenges facing rural areas affect individual communities in distinct ways. There is clearly a role for rural community members to identify and overcome barriers and influence policy that has an impact on their lives. This participation contributes to agency and resilience as community members make decisions to strengthen their communities. There is an important role for education that involves rural community members in their own community in a process of learning through discussion of rural community issues and solutions. Ultimately, this process of community education may lead to a new way of engaging in political life, or renewing an interest in political process in rural areas. In this way, rural community members are directly involved in shaping rural community development that fits their community needs. Fortunately, Alberta's historical context is ripe with examples of civic engagement and social action from which our contemporary society can draw inspiration. Understanding Alberta's rich historical context underscores the urgency to address the issue of rural out-migration as problematic, and illuminates the need to critically assess the current role of rural communities. In the next sections I outline the historical context of Alberta, and then turn to rural identity, exploring youth mobility and potential for return. In subsequent sections I discuss the foundation of Alberta's rural roots.

Situating Rural Youth Migration in the Context of Alberta

Over the years, Alberta has experienced different shifts in population growth and development. It is important to acknowledge that First Nations peoples were the only inhabitants in Alberta until traders arrived in the late 1700s (University of Alberta Library Heritage Community Foundation, 2009). Although a thorough development of this point is beyond the scope of this study, recognizing this history is critical to accurately situate this research. By 1901 there were only 73,022 people living in what is now Alberta, but with the Canadian government's *National Policy* there was significant immigration in the 1920s with a boom in 1913 (University of Alberta Library Heritage Community Foundation, 2009). This immigration was coupled with a process of urbanization, and an increase in urbanization after World War II. In 1941 over 66 per cent of the population lived in rural areas. By 1961 almost 70 per

cent lived in town and cities, and by 1996 the number rose to over 80 per cent (University of Alberta Library Heritage Community Foundation, 2009). Rural population decline after World War II was impacted by shifting agricultural practices which will be discussed in the next section. Despite trends in rural population decline and increases in the size of farms, the population of rural Alberta grew by over 20 per cent between 1966 and 1996 (University of Alberta Library Heritage Community Foundation, 2009). Despite periods of population growth, over time the population of rural communities has declined. Today only 20 per cent of Albertans live in rural areas, and less than 8 per cent of the population connected to agriculture (University of Alberta Library Heritage Community Foundation, 2009). These statistics reflect national shifts in population. Population growth and increased urbanization illustrate important trends of migration from rural to urban centers, and have a significant impact on services offered in rural areas, food systems, recreational spaces, agricultural land and water – resources that impact rural populations.

Rural and small towns that experience population growth are generally adjacent to areas where there is easy access to jobs in larger urban centers, as well as reserves or more remote summer villages where urban employment was not the major driver (Hornbrook, Hannes, Bentzen, and Hameister, 2003). While population growth occurred most rapidly along the Highway #1 corridors between Medicine Hat, Calgary, and Banff, and Highway #2 between Calgary and Edmonton, and natural resource rich Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, generally, there are diverse patterns of population growth and decline (Hornbrook, et al., 2003). It is the overall decline of the rural areas that is important to this research, and more critically, what impact this decline has on both the rural and urban communities. Further, the reasons for the diverse patterns of population growth and decline, or the ability to work with local assets and overcome challenges will help to frame the issues of rural sustainability and rural youth out-migration. It is important to recognize that population changes have resulted in some rural communities thriving while others struggle. These dynamics may influence why youth stay, leave or potentially return to a rural community. In the next section I explore some of the factors that impact rural communities.

Political and Economic Context and Rural Sustainability

Policy makers, researchers and community members including parents, farmers, families, and educators, are increasingly aware of the importance of vibrant rural communities. In order to overcome declining rural community bonds and strengthen local political involvement, a new way of thinking about education, community, and democracy is required (Longo, 2007). A more inclusive way of exploring the issues, such as youth out-migration, involves connecting publically to learn and act collectively. This shift in consciousness is especially relevant to rural communities hoping to retain a younger generation. I provide a glimpse of rural Alberta to set the stage for this engagement to occur. The history of Alberta includes a strong sense of public engagement and bridging connections between formal and nonformal spaces to teach democratic skills, and share local knowledge. Community-level thinking about pressures facing rural communities is critical to counter decisions that are made *for* rather than *with* and *by* rural community members. These rural communities are intrinsically connected with other rural and urban communities through trade, water, recreation, biodiversity, social and cultural heritage and geography (Reimer, 2007). These factors impact community sustainability and sharing local knowledge of these integrated systems is crucial to understanding how to strengthen rural communities.

This study explores these key issues relative to rural life and community futures, and demonstrates the value of knowledge-making between generations. An understanding of rural community members' lived experiences informs sociological theory and empirical research (Hillyard, 2007). The total population of Canada has grown, while rural populations are declining. Rural population decline is due in part to increased technology in single-industry communities where labour has been replaced with machines, compounded by communities with declining infrastructure which cannot support a large employment base (Clemenson and Pitblado, 2007, p.26).

Over the past decade, researchers have demonstrated that some social and economic development processes are increasing inequality, particularly related to economy, environmental impacts, and women's experiences of disadvantage in rural

settings (Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Hauser, and Wieringa, 1994; Chapman and Lloyd, 1996). Contemporary Canadian researchers unpack the complexity of rural issues and examine the intersections between a sense of belonging, space, place, class, and gender ideologies (Pocius, 2000; Reimer, Burns, and Gareau, 2007). My research explores rural youth out-migration which has not been previously addressed by these scholars.

Global economic integration has had a notable impact on Canadian communities, including the rural sector, over the past two decades (Alasia, Bollman, Leveque, Parkins and Reimer, 2008). In addressing rural community vulnerability, researchers (Alasia, et al., 2008) identify that, while there are new economic opportunities in the primary resource sector, globalization and foreign competition has had a negative impact on regions that are dependent on agriculture, forestry or labor-intensive manufacturing and otherwise vulnerable to declines in population and employment. Further, 1 out of every 5 communities in Canada is vulnerable to a loss of population, and about 1 in 20 is vulnerable to a decline in employment (Alasia, et al., 2008). The Prairies, northern and remote regions are among the most vulnerable. Most relevant to my thesis are the results that demonstrate that global restructuring trends increase community vulnerability to population and employment decline; high unemployment rates increase the vulnerability to decline, while community assets, such as human capital, participation, and economic diversification reduce vulnerability to population decline (Allesandro, et al., 2008).

Rural community stakeholders value policy that is grounded in their lived experience and includes them in all levels of policy-making; furthermore, as Roppel, Desmarals, and Martz (2006) assert, policy must respond to their rural communities by seeking participation and local input to address the central roles of health and environment. The literature on rural community development (Reimer, 2007; Pocius, 2000; Reimer, Burns, and Gareau, 2007) supports the community-based approach I have chosen for this thesis. Previous literature on rural community sustainability (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002) illustrates the importance of understanding both a sense of place, and the connections between the social, environmental and economic factors that shape rural communities.   Social factors, culture, economics,

environment and agriculture are intrinsically connected in rural communities. Orr (2004) emphasizes the value of place and pedagogy for a "sense of rootedness, responsibility and belonging" (p.88). Scholars Westhues (2003), Swift, Davies, Clarke, and Czerny (2003), Epp (2001) and Suzuki (2005) explore social, environmental and economic factors. An exploration of how these factors are interconnected and part of our rural identity is an area for further exploration.

Education for this purpose involves a process of learning from the experiences of local community members, and in the context of the rural community. It is evident that there is a need for education that focuses on youth and adults, and explores how and in what ways key factors impact rural communities. This non-formal education between youth and adults in the rural community context has not been explored in depth, though the work of educators Garbarino (1992), McLaren (1998), Green and Woodrow (2004) provide evidence of the value of nonformal and experiential learning. This thesis addresses this gap by proposing a community dialogue, using a nonformal educational approach that connects youth and adults to explore local issues. Learning is based on the reciprocity between youth and adults. I now turn to a history of Alberta that demonstrates engagement and civic participation.

Building on History, Tradition and Civic Engagement

In this section I provide evidence that links Alberta history with a strong civil society. Civic engagement extends beyond participation in rural life and includes an active investment in community life. This concept is important because it demonstrates agency and the importance of community members of all ages having a role in shaping the future of their communities.

For the purpose of this study, I draw on Longo's (2007) concept of civic engagement to include "public work (projects creating things of public value); community involvement (membership in community groups and community service); community organizing (canvassing, protesting, and building power relations); civic knowledge (awareness of government processes and following public affairs); conventional political action (voting, campaign work, and advocacy); and public dialogue (deliberate conversations on public issues)" (p.14). These are

overlapping and interconnected practices that connect education, community life, and learning through shared knowledge, and have roots in rural Canadian communities. The tradition, stories, and connections illustrated through this rich history provide clear examples of the strength of rural networks and the power of community organizing to build resiliency.

The strength of rural networks illustrates the extent that rural mattered in the past, and why is it so critical to have rural voices heard now, for our future generations. A brief overview of the history of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) provides a foundation for talking about the present and future visions of rural Alberta. The United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) formed in 1909 as a merger between the Alberta Farmers' Association and the Canadian Society for Equity (University of Alberta Libraries Heritage Community Foundation (Heritage), 2009). Women joined in 1913 as United Farm Women of Alberta (UFWA) and the farmers' union became the most influential advocacy group in Alberta.

The UFA acted as a government lobby group, rather than a political party. It was non-partisan and operated with the principles of group government with elected delegates (University of Alberta Libraries Heritage Community Foundation (Heritage), 2009). UFA set policies and proposals at an annual convention, and held meetings at town halls. Later the UFA entered provincial political election, but continued to take a stance not as a political party, but an organization responsible and responsive to its rural community members. In community town hall meetings, local community members' concerns were heard about local issues that impacted their lives. Through community participation and organizing, the UFA coordinated dialogue and action that was relevant to the rural context. This spirit of organizing and advocacy serves as a powerful example of civic engagement (and led to winning thirty-eight out of sixty-one seats in 1921, and marked the end of Liberal reign in Alberta). This example illustrates the profound impact that community engagement and sense of commitment to a local area has on strengthening rural communities.

This evidence of social and civic engagement in Alberta's history is significant because it serves as a powerful reminder of a sense of responsibility to a group or community and its members, and enables us to see possibilities for advocating for why rural areas matter, and to envision successes despite the complex challenges facing rural areas. The sense of community in these examples illustrates membership and belonging that I will elaborate on in subsequent sections of my thesis. This sense of community and membership enhances not only participation, but true engagement in the challenges of rural community life. Some of these challenges, and population changes over time, revolve around land use and shifts in local economy and infrastructure. Rural places matter to community members on a personal level, and they have a broader importance as part of an integrated system of resources, land use, and food production, points to which I now turn.

Rural Matters – Sustaining Local Economies and Agriculture

Land use, and more importantly, public perception of rural land and a sense of connection to the land has shifted in part in response to population changes and rapid industrial development. Williams (2007) recognizes this trend and cautions against rapid industrial growth citing negative impacts such as labour shortages, while Epp (2007) describes the decline of local small-scale food production, encroachment of industrial and recreational pressures as well as rising tensions over uses of water and resources; agriculture is endangered, Epp argues, and rural communities are at risk.

The numbers are staggering: farm size in 1921 was an average of 198 acres; jumping to 608 acres in 1996, and nearly doubling by 2002 to reach 1200 acres. Twenty per cent of prairie farms now produce 80 per cent of grain and livestock (Ross, 2002), and less than 8 per cent of the population is involved in agriculture (University of Alberta Library Encyclopedia, 2009). These claims are backed by evidence from Statistics Canada Census of Agriculture (2006) which records fewer than 50,000 farms in Alberta – another five year drop (7.9 per cent), combined with an aging farming population (49.9-52.2 per cent), farm operations bought and expanded by large-scale agri-business, and numbers of farmers employed full-time to

generate sufficient off-farm income (Epp, 2007). Can rural Albertans reverse this trend of decline? Should they? Strong rural populations are important to support local decision making and land stewardship. The cost of rural decline is high, with losses of agriculture and food production impacting land, food systems, and communities. Ross (2002) advocates for a rural revolution for Alberta farmers to counter a wake of "shattered dreams, polluted environments, and communities left to deal with a host of social problems" (p.18). I turn to discuss these interconnections and potential responses in the following section.

Agriculture and local food production are essential systems for human survival, and are largely based in rural areas (Bomke and Rojas, 2000). The interconnections between land, food and communities are important because they represent how we value our relationships with the rest of nature, and our ways of "seeing, perceiving, knowing and understanding nature" (Bomke and Rojas, 2000, p. 4). This way of viewing our natural world extends beyond sustaining local economies. Our understanding of how our food systems sustain human life undoubtedly impacts how we view our ties to our human environment. If our food sources and ecological systems are fundamental to our survival, in other words, rural communities and rural people matter.

Land, Food, and Communities

Ableman (2005) speaks with a voice of experience on the land when he emphasizes that although it may be assumed that a farmer who has been connected to the same land for over twenty years would have all the answers, he has many more questions than solutions. As he maintains "the climate is different, the marketplace has changed, the condition of the soil may have improved, but in subtle and unpredictable ways" (Ableman, 2005, p. 176). His lessons are applicable to the challenges in the changing landscape of Alberta. He maintains the necessity to continue the process of learning and growing, to recognize the important agricultural skill of observation, and the fundamental evidence that biological systems are dynamic (Ableman, 2005). Further, Ableman (2005) asserts that our connections with the land involve a complex fulfillment that our society longs for: "relationships that are local, biological,

interpersonal, and ecological," as well as understanding our food systems and "knowing the people who grew the food, knowing that their families were paid a living wage, knowing that the land has been well cared for and protected from development…" (p. 179).

According to Ableman (2005) and Lyson (2004), a possible solution lies in community members taking responsibility into their own hands for their land, food, and education systems. As scholars and practitioners suggest, examples of local land use and decision-making power include community member input in farmers markets, small-scale farming, regional initiatives, and community gardens (Ableman, 2005; Lyson, 2004). There is evidence of each of these examples in rural Alberta, such as the prevalence of rural farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms, and a growing sustainable food movement. These initiatives are important to rural community organizing because they have the potential to involve both youth and adults in this important sector. In the following section I expand on the ideas of developing and caring for local resources.

Resource Development, Environmental Stewardship

Sustainable resource development, environmental stewardship, and the role of rural communities in sustaining natural resources are themes that are gaining attention. As a testament to the powerful impact of resource extraction in Alberta, and more specifically oil and gas, consider a typical day in Alberta. Yeomans (2004) asserts that from the moment we wake up in the morning to the moment we go to sleep, oil controls our lives. Its influences reach into politics, international affairs, global economies, human rights, and the environmental health of our planet, while more than 97% of our transportation, 40% of our energy and daily petroleum products dramatically illustrate our dependence on oil (Yeomans, 2004). Yeoman's description of a day without oil necessarily questions our dependence and our patterns of consumption (2004). Yet, as McCullum (2006) maintains, the political landscape in Alberta does not demonstrate an appropriate response to the scope and scale of our reliance on this resource and its development, thus "the rapid expansion of the tar sands is happening in a social vacuum…not only has the government failed

to plan for or address the energy and environmental implications of massive expansion," he argues, but they have ignored the social costs (p.47).

Environmental impacts, then, coupled with the high social and agricultural cost of population decline are central to the argument for why there is an urgent need for attention to rural communities. The link to out-migration here is that these factors matter and result in declining social opportunities. The loss of rural agriculture and food production contribute to an increasing disconnect between community members and a declining rural population. A larger population may not have immediate answers or responses to the costs of rapid resource development, but they have a greater infrastructure, broader economic base, and larger local workforce with which to sustain the local community.

Dependence on natural resource extraction, and the subsequent oil and gas development in Alberta, has had profound environmental implications ranging from care for the earth, our connection to the land, and shifts in our use of prime agricultural land. Berry (2005) outlines the complexity of agricultural-economic problems by highlighting the dependence on purchased technology, fuels, credit, and fertilizer, and the community problems "beginning with depopulation and the removal of sources, services, and markets" branching out to view the effects on "nature, the life of the cities, and into the cultural and economic life of the nation" (p. 32). The real problem of food production is rooted in greed and desire for profit, and part of a "complex mutually influential relationship of soil, plants, animals, and people…a real solution to that problem will therefore be ecologically, agriculturally, and culturally healthful" (Berry, 2005, p. 33). Berry (2005) claims that possible solutions or alternatives might be found if we understand how our populations and our environments are connected as part of a system. His underlying message of systems and interlocking patterns necessarily connects the social, political, and economic forces of oil and gas on communities. Next I illustrate how Orr (2005) develops this idea of connectedness and stewardship through a sense of place and belonging. Orr's (2005) description of place emphasizes the interrelatedness between a sense of rural identity; rural out-migration, land use, and environment:

> A place has a human history and a geographical past; it is part of an ecosystem with a variety of Microsystems, it is a landscape with a particular flora and fauna. Its inhabitants are part of a social, economic, and political order: they import or export energy materials, water, and wastes, they are linked by innumerable bonds to other places. A place cannot be understood from the vantage point of a single discipline or specialization. (Orr, 2005, p. 91).

In these landscapes, Orr's (2005) emphasis on the connections that community members have to the social, economic, environmental and political order is consistent with my previous analysis that rural places are an integral part of the land, food, and community equation. These rural landscapes are best understood as a "complex mosaic of phenomena and problems" (Orr, 2005. p. 91) and is situated in a broader connection between one place and others. This assertion calls attention to history and geography while it builds a case for strengthening connections between generations, and considering problems at the local level. Learning occurs with relationships and local knowledge at the core. The emphasis on teaching and learning from local experience is especially relevant to the local knowledge and relationships in rural communities (Armstrong, 2005). Strengthening these knowledge systems and sharing wisdom across generations are keystones to building sustainable rural communities. In the next section I discuss local knowledge systems. I outline how connections are built through engaging in community life, and how these links can be strengthened through knowledge systems that focus on community-based education.

Civic Engagement and Community Education

Emerging from the social and economic landscape in Alberta is a strong tradition of civic engagement that supports a community-based model of dialogue and decision-making. This position calls attention to local knowledge and participation in community life. Scholars emphasize the importance of paying attention to local, indigenous knowledge and concern for the complex interplay of land, food, and community (Orr, 2005; Lyson, 2004). Suzuki (1997) contends that "[t]he knowledge of every band of human beings, acquired and accumulated through generations of observation, experience and conjecture, [is] a priceless legacy for survival…small family groups of nomadic hunter-gatherers depended on skills and knowledge that were profoundly local, embedded in the flora, fauna, climate, and geology of a region" and these experiences were woven together in a story or world view where

"human beings were deeply and inextricably immersed" tied to the local where human beings were at the center, struggling to "make sense" of their world (p.11). Suzuki (1997) maintains that solutions may be found in these narratives. Although these scholars are not referring directly to rural populations in Alberta, attention to local and indigenous knowledge draws from history of places cultivated over generations, and provides a foundation of community-based research on which to base decisions.

An understanding of local context, and the capacity building power of sharing local knowledge between generations, is consistent with Habermas (1981) assertion that the key to emancipation is communication. Dialogue between generations that encourages participation opens spaces for deliberate discourse between individuals, which Habermas considers essential communication that engages citizens. This pragmatic approach to reviving a public sphere brings deliberative democracy into the spotlight, and focuses on an inclusive decision-making process based on thinking and acting on matters of public importance. This communication process and knowledge sharing is emancipatory, and it encourages a deeper level of engagement and action.

Context, in Habermas' (1981) terms frames a process of understanding that is built on a foundation of culturally ingrained pre-understanding. In other words, interpreting events in a community context, for example, involves an understanding of others' interpretations and perceptions (p. 100). An intergenerational dialogue provides a forum to understand the messiness of community dynamics and experiences, and how events or issues might look very different when framed from various points of view, across generations. Youth may have an untainted perspective on what is possible, but a more limited understanding of the playing field, while adults may benefit from framing the strengths and challenges within a rural community to consider different interpretations and perspectives. Intergenerational dialogue builds the public sphere in which to engage youth and adults in deliberative dialogue that sets the stage of inclusive thinking and decision-making on local matters that is consistent with the previous work on communication and action of Habermas (1981).

A true democratic process of civic engagement in Alberta, with attention to rural areas, requires a broad, systematic call for action through an intergenerational model of community engagement. A broad approach that includes youth and adults at the core is critical to long-term planning and lasting change. True democracy means "self-governing by the people" in which critical decisions require large representation in decision-making (Suzuki, p. 79):

> All around the world, people are finding new ways to craft a new values system, even from deep within the existing paradigm. People who live in the belly of the beast are also fighting back; they too are actively creating new kinds of financial institutions with new rules. They are quietly revolutionizing the economies of entire countries. The lessons they're learning are already out there, success stories in the real world, and they prove that our monolithic economic structure is beginning to develop some cracks…entire countries are figuring out how to withdraw consent (Suzuki, 2000, p. 82).

There is a growing body of literature that supports this position. Scholars call for emphasis on the interconnectedness of global issues (See for example, Pike, 2000; and Hall, 2006). Hall (2006) recognizes individual and collective action, and the "…creative role of consciousness and cognition on all human action" with actors taking part in theorizing and acting for social change (p. 233). The individual and collective action that Hall (2006) describes supports a community-based approach to engage rural youth and adults in conversations about factors that impact rural communities. This knowledge about local resources and development is essential to future decisions about local issues such as land use and food security in rural Alberta. In order to share build and share local knowledge, it is important to consider how community members are connected. An issue that arises when discussing rural sustainability is rural decline, and how community-based social and political responses might strengthen resistance to the discourses of decline and despair.

Resisting the Decline of Rural Communities

The trend of overall rural demise amplifies social issues and poverty for rural communities facing barriers such as high farm-input costs and a crisis in the livestock industry (Fairbairn, 2008). While new crops, improved roads, chemicals and fertilizers, and mechanization have increased production and sheer numbers of acres

per farm, farmers often struggle to compete in the free market economy (Ross, 2002). There is growing concern over low farm incomes and their impact on rural Canada, but this concern extends to the broader rural community. The distance to travel to health centers and the lack of public transportation are cited as two challenges particularly for the most vulnerable groups: the elderly, those with special needs or disabilities, or single parents who have difficulty accessing health resources and social services (Fairbairn, 2008). Fairbairn expresses the decline as cyclical:

> A vicious circle of decline often develops, for remote and often resource-dependent rural communities; low population means there is a lack of critical mass for public services, infrastructure, and business investment. The lack of business investment leads to fewer jobs, resulting in the out-migration of youth and ultimately reduced population – and thus the circle continues.

This stark reality, coupled with the visible signs of decay - demolished schools, boarded windows on main street businesses, and ghostly elevators - lies in sharp contrast to the vast blue sky and waving wheat field images on the Cargill and Round-up chemical company billboard signs on the TransCanada highway. Further, Monsanto and Cargill are vertically integrated corporations, protected even when farmers face economic downturn, because these companies are involved in all aspects of production, trading, financing, manufacturing, marketing, and distribution (Ross, 2002). What is to be learned from this discourse of despair? What is it like to live in a rural community? Is there a rural identity based on shared history, geography, sense of community or shared values? How will we know if renewed attention to rural communities is successful? In order to respond to these questions, I draw on educators and scholars (e.g. Faircloth, 2009; Corbett, 2009) who call for responsive rural education policies that recognize the distinctness of rural youth and rural communities. By striving to understand the tensions that face rural youth, we redirect our attention and investment to rural communities facing decline. By opening doors for advancing the learning and skills of the younger generation–whether this education is in the rural community or beyond the rural community–we emphasize the importance of rural places and rural community development.

Two current trends of migration in to rural communities are worth noting here. First, in some rural communities, there is an influx of urban residents seeking low-

cost housing. They are drawn "not necessarily for employment opportunities. Instead, families are attracted by the availability and affordability of housing, safer communities, portability of welfare benefits, better school systems, and overall quality of life" (Lawson Clark, 2012). These newcomers are replacing (filling their housing space) an older population in part because of out-migration of youth. Homes previously owned by seniors are suddenly vacant, and the town sells them at bargain prices (in this way they can continue to collect property taxes, or they are abandoned). Second, there are greater numbers of immigrants moving to rural communities, and they are a force for change. As Lichter (2012) explains, they are increasingly part of the fabric of "agro-food systems, community life, labor force change, economic development, schools and schooling, demographic change, inter-group relations, and politics". While there are positive developments and explorations of local food systems and farmers' markets in rural Alberta and western provinces (Wittman, Beckie, Hergesheimer, 2012), there are increasing numbers of temporary residents and immigrant families who relocate to rural communities in Alberta as labourers to harvest and produce food, or as part of a strategy to relocate refugee families. Both of these examples, families relocating for low-cost housing, and immigrant families moving to rural areas, require a deeper level of analysis in terms of their identity, their place in the rural community, and how to negotiate new systems and relationships. These waves of new members have an impact on rural re-structure and the future of rural communities, but they do not replace the youth demographic that is leaving, and their presence shifts the structure and dynamics of the rural community. A third trend, urban and foreign ownership of rural land and homes, has profound outcomes for rural areas and community development, and is an issue that will gain prominence as more farmers retire.

Dialogue, as I explore in this study, offers a way of examining how these shifts in populations impact the structures (concrete and relational) and dynamics in the community (Lawson Clark, 2012). For example, in large urban centres there are cultural brokers like Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative in Edmonton that act as a bridge between families and necessary resources. Agencies like this advocate for new immigrant families, and are sources of support for language, navigating

education systems, and integrating into urban life. Are there urban-rural "brokers"? In some cases there is a resource or organization like Family Support Services that works with nonformal leaders in ethno cultural communities in a rural community, but more often this infrastructure is less formal. In Tofield, Alberta, for example, a group of community members is getting together to address how they might be perceived as welcoming or exclusive, and how they can approach integrating new foreign workers and their families into the town with openness. These families face many barriers similar to the mobile youth population - rural employment is often based on labour and industry, or is low-paying service and retail. There may be divisions in understanding between long-term residents and the new generations, challenges of integrating or feeling they do not belong in the community, and competition for local resources such as schools and services that may result in conflict between in-migrants and those whose families have lived in the local community for generations (Lawson Clark, 2012).

Youth and adults in dialogue could explore these tensions and questions and formulate their own response to changing rural community economies and demographics. This civic engagement informs practice, or ways of acting between community members, and is foundational to policy that is based on place, to best meet the needs of the rural community. Even if a process of including new community members may be slow, there is space to explore migration and what it means to be engaged in or belong to a community, and to challenge perspectives from various vantage points.

Rural Identity – Youth Mobility and Potential for Return

The idea of mobility and the potential to return is emphasized by Corbett (2009) in his assertion that rather than trying to keep rural youth in place, policy makers and educators should focus on encouraging the majority to pursue higher education, but then create the conditions for their return, focusing on the sustainability of rural communities. While they are focused on resisting the decline of rural communities, are rural community members ready to support young people's efforts to return? Are they ready to support those who have ventured further from their rural community for

additional education or those who may choose to return? Is it feasible to leave and return? Is this the best approach to the issue of rural out-migration? Young people who have left rural communities still talk about their rural upbringing and rural identity. What is a rural identity, and what is rurality? Although I have defined rural for the purpose of this study, the idea of "rurality" is deeply problematic, and raises additional questions of why these places and people are distinct and worth sustaining. A communal sense of place, responsibility, and belonging are described by the participants in this study, and are evident in the literature. Rural in this sense is not taken as a given, but is impacted by those who live there, and those who carry these experiences of rural place and values with them. Faircloth's (2009) words reflect a sense of tension and emotional distance as she reflects on her "communal sense of shared identity, beliefs, and values" as she grapples with the idea of going home:

> The more educated I've become, the more distanced I feel from my community; not so much in terms of physical distance, but in the communal sense of shared identity, beliefs, and values. I am in essence a border crosser – not completely comfortable in either the world of academia or in the community in which I spent the bulk of my childhood and early adulthood. Education has provided an opportunity for me to see and experience a world I have never seen before, but it has also distanced me from the world in which I grew up. I often ask myself, "Can I go home? …I continue to grapple with the idea of going home and giving back (p.2).

Although geography is part of the definition of rural, identity goes beyond these limitations. For example, learning from Faircloth's experience, there is a sense of distance from her rural community, and that formal education did not prepare her to "navigate the borders" between her rural communities of origin and the rest of the world, but rather aimed to reinforce the idea that the rural place she was born was her place, and not to journey too far from home (Faircloth, 2009). Her experience demonstrates the complexity of rural identity or *identities*, leaving and returning, and adds additional layers of gender and culture. Dew and Law (1995) elaborate on how one's experience growing up in a rural place continues to shape the way that rurality can impact educational experiences and identity. The importance of hearing these distinct voices in the discussion about rural community development, rural out-migration, and building healthy, sustainable communities lies in the profound need to understand youth migration and

engagement in rural communities. Dew and Law (1995) also grapple with the hierarchy and divisiveness of academic environments, and illustrate the struggle of balancing the values of a working-class or rural background with the privilege of university system. The idea of being caught between the language of home and the ideas of school that Dew and Law (1995) describe is echoed in the lived experiences of many participants in this study. Further, Faircloth's (2009) experience carries the weight of a story that brings theory alive. Although we can theorize about the roles that researchers, policy makers, educators, and community developers might play, the experiences of those closest to the issue are critical to the debate and to informing the process of change.

Impact of Youth Migration and Engagement in Rural Communities

In this final section, I explore the importance of rural communities and emphasize the relevance of supporting youth in these communities. Although there is some research on inter-provincial migration, there is limited understanding of rural-urban migration patterns or supports that are especially relevant in Alberta or why rural or urban youth may choose to move to or return to rural areas (Tremblay, 2001; Looker, 2001). Rural populations in Alberta are impacted by aging populations, youth out-migration, rural community members moving to larger centers, and lack of immigration to most rural communities (Bruce, 2008). One of the key strategies for re-population is to retain existing population, including youth and young families, bringing new population to rural areas (including urban residents and immigrants) and repatriation (Bruce, 2008). This notion of repatriation or return is significant because it shifts the focus away from trying to keep young people from leaving to pursue education and training, but focuses attention on what type of community or relationships and economic opportunities might draw them back. Creating opportunities and networks that enable the younger generation to return to the rural community is critical to overcoming challenges and issues of decline in rural areas, and to build resilience and a sense of possibility. I discuss these ideas in greater depth in subsequent chapters.

Research in the field of community economic development indicates that there are role models and potential mentors willing to work with youth (Rural Migration

News, 2009). While out-migration, specifically youth leaving is expressed by local business people as problematic, some business owners in a recent study in Nova Scotia stated that they see "their role within the community to provide educational opportunities such as co-operative placements and apprenticeships" (Rural Migration News, p.17), and researchers envision that this community support, coupled with government initiative and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship could provide realistic options for youth in their rural communities. While this research was conducted in Nova Scotia, it is a sentiment that may be echoed in other rural areas, and may help to address rural out-migration or encourage youth to return.

Why is understanding youth migration and youth engagement in rural communities significant? The issue of rural out-migration affects individuals, families and communities in profound ways (Roppel, Desmarals, and Martz, 2006). With the direct connection between increased mobility and destabilization of rural communities in Alberta, rural out-migration has a residual consequence for those who choose to remain in rural areas (Epp, 2007). Evidence suggests that the next generation of rural youth will face profound barriers in local employment and training opportunities if the rural communities decline. According to Statistics Canada, "migrating youth can be seen as an indicator of the state of rural areas and they are a key factor to rural development" with a direct impact of migration on human capital – defined as education, experience, and abilities of the population (Statistics Canada, 1996). Through consultation with rural youth, scholars determined that the top reasons why youth leave rural communities are to pursue education, find employment, or accompany family to new locations (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000). Moreover, the rapid economic growth and development that comes with resource extraction (oil and mining initiatives) may not produce the anticipated benefits of providing jobs or supports for local youth that encourage them to stay in their rural communities (Looker, 2001).

The statistics mentioned previously, and the statements that rural youth are seeking mentorship and local supports for training, employment, and education opportunities, provide crucial evidence of the issue (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000). Scholars indicate that responses to rural youth out-migration, such as training,

employment, and education opportunities, are critical in small communities if youth are to have a sense of purpose and connection with the social and economic sectors of the rural community (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000). The underlying assumption is that social and political engagement, as well as recognition of the importance of participation and a sense of place, is central to the investigative questions that underpin analysis of rural youth out-migration, the policy implications, and range of possible solutions.

The problem of declining rural populations is emphasized by the Alberta government along with a related cluster of policy issues including loss of vital services, employment opportunities, leadership, young people, and political voice (Alberta Government, Alberta: Land of opportunity report, 2004) . However, researchers also recognize possibility and hope in a shared history and memory, as well as a collective response to loss of land, community identity, and power in a rural community context (Epp and Whitson, 2001).

In response to the problem of declining rural populations, the provincial government rural development strategy names youth as "critical links" in rural communities, and emphasizes the importance of senior community members, Aboriginal community members, and the natural environment (Alberta Government, 2005). The dialogue approach provides one way to organize and create space for this critical link to occur, which is a point that I will build on in Chapters 6 and 7. Alberta government policies related to rural development reflects the importance of this research, stating a commitment to working with youth to determine issues and involving youth in policy and program development at a provincial level (Alberta Government, 2005). This study provides evidence for how youth, side-by-side with adults, can be directly involved and engaged in rural communities. In the next section I introduce the profile of Kitscoty as the rural community that became the basis for this research.

A Profile of a Rural Community – Describing Kitscoty

In this section I describe the rural community of Kitscoty. For this profile, I consider factors, or circumstances, facts, or influences (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009) that

contribute to the resulting dynamics of the rural community. In subsequent chapters I consider these factors in my research questions.

The population of the Village of Kitscoty according to its 2011 municipal census is 892, a 5.3% increase from its 2010 municipal census population of 847 (Statistics in this section are from Statistics Canada 2011, 2006 and Alberta Community Profiles). This is also nearly a 20% increase from its 2006 population of 709. This is compared with 10% growth in population growth in Alberta overall. The population overall is almost evenly split by gender in 2006, with 345 males, and 365 females. In terms of age, the median age in Kitscoty is 30, relatively low compared with other rural communities in the region. In Kitscoty, the average age for males is 32, females is 29; compared with age 35 for males and 36 for females in Alberta. Although there are more females than males age 15-30 in the community, there are more males than females age 30-45, and slightly more males aged 45-60. The greater number of males may be related to post-secondary path of the population over age 15: 12% take apprenticeship or trades certification; 11% pursue university, 24 % college, 29% high school, and 24% less than high school. 15% of the local population work in the trades, and many more in industry or trades-related careers.

This census data shows that Kitscoty is unusual in its youth population and ability to retain youth. The community Chamber of Commerce has invested in community mapping, and speaks of this large youth population on their town website. For comparison, in the nearby village of Viking, the median age is 47. The population is 1,085, an increase of just 30 from 2001. The population of nearby Elk Point is 1487, with a median age of 33. Lacombe, Alberta has a median age 36.4, with 78% of the population aged 15 and over. In my home community in rural Saskatchewan, in sharp contrast, the median age is 55.2, with 86.5% of the population over aged 15.   The population in 2006 was 742, a decrease of more than 8% from a population of 812 in 2001. It is not surprising that the residents of Kitscoty are proud to talk about their community and recognize that beyond these numbers, it is uncommon to have such a huge

percentage of younger residents. This is an advantage for Kitscoty and an opportunity to further develop the community through youth.

As you approach the community of Kitscoty, one of the first impressionable sites is the local golf course on the way into town. The lush green grass seems a sign that it is well-used and maintained. The community slogan, "Biggest Little Sports Centre in Alberta" reflects the commitment to sports and recreation, and I was told that there are long-standing traditions of softball and annual picnics in the community. Notably, there are community members out walking or biking together along the side roads leading into town. There are railroad tracks near Kitscoty, which are symbols of early community life and infrastructure. Near town, farm machinery equipment sits alongside recreational vehicles and trailers. The town schools are located together on the edge of town, within walking distance of the local rink and a new community hall. The elementary school has a new bright coloured adventure playground. The town main street includes a local hotel and coffee shop, the Wheatfield Inn or "Wheatie," a Chinese Restaurant, post office with posters of local events, two antique stores (one located in the old boarding school), a local craft and gift shop, grocery store, gas station and bank. The Seniors Centre and the town office are just a block off Main Street, and the health center is within a few blocks of downtown Kitscoty. Just on the edge of town, near a new housing developing, is the community walking and biking trail. One evening when I walked along the trail, snow geese were settled over the nearby body of water.

Geographical (environmental) factors, or the physical place with potential significance in the intersections of land, food production, agriculture, and people in a community (Lyson, 2004), have an importance influence on rural community. Kitscoty is at the junction of Highway 16 (Yellowhead Highway) and Highway 897. This location on the proposed link to Cold Lake impacts future work opportunities for local youth. Kitscoty is midway between Saskatoon (295km) and Edmonton (225 km) and short commuting distance to Lloydminster. This location with easy access to urban centres has positive impacts and challenges for rural population and community development. It is notable that the main mode of transportation internally, and to commute outside Kitscoty, is 86% vehicle (main

driver), 9% vehicle (passenger) and 5% public transit. There is no local bus service, but there may be less formal transit service or local taxi. In this study, I am most interested in how these factors impact the connections between where the respondents feel most at home in a physical space and how this might reflect their interests and values, their sense of place, rural identity and belonging.

Like many rural communities, Kitscoty is relatively homogenous, with only 15 community members identifying as Aboriginal, and 20 members identifying as visible minority. 97% speak English only, and 95% of the community members are "non-immigrants" according to Statistics Canada. Just over 70% of the population is age 15 and older. Nearby Elk Point, with a population of 1487, has 290 Aboriginal community members, and 80 visible minority members. Cultural factors contribute to community identity, knowledge, values, and experience; it "facilitates common understandings, traditions, and values, all central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being," and contributes to building a sense of local identity and solidarity" (Brennan, 2001; 2008) p. 1).

In terms of economy, Kitscoty is located in a prime agricultural area which has heavy oil activity, both of which provide employment for local residents. Kitscoty is a prime agricultural district with heavy farming and ranching activity, and the main economic base continues to be agriculture, mainly mixed grain and cattle farming. Strong oil activity has created many local jobs, mainly service and local oil based businesses. The employment rate in Kitscoty is 83.5%. Based on the local labour force, the majority of residents are employed in business and community services (34.2%), mining (17.6%), and construction (12.3%). Median earnings in Kitscoty are $27, 829, with a median after tax income per household of $54, 528. This compares with the average household income in Alberta which is $43,964. Median earnings in the rural community of Viking are $20,997, with household earning of $37,318, and in Elk Point, median income for age 15 and over is $24,041 and $40, 950 per household income. In Kitscoty, the number of rented dwellings (80) rent for an average rate of $750/month, compared to the number of owned dwellings (175) with the median dwelling worth $163,338. The average house price affirms that housing

prices are lower in this rural community, (for comparison, average housing value in Viking is just over $100,000) a potential factor that participants in this study name as a reason to return.

Economic factors include factors as jobs, labour market, skill training, and employment, as well as rural community economic development initiatives such as cooperatives or social enterprise (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2004; CCEDnet, 2009; Bartolic, 2005) rooted in broader social goals and enhanced rural sustainable development (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000; Lyson, 2004). These economic factors for the purpose of this thesis build on leadership and participation in local economies, and a commitment to local resources as emphasized by the Canadian Community Economic Development network (CCED).

Education factors help to explore community population and infrastructure. Unlike many towns this size, Kitscoty still has an elementary school and secondary high school. Kitscoty Elementary school has 259 students in Grades 1-6, and the school houses a parent administered private kindergarten. It serves the community of Kitscoty, the surrounding agricultural area as well as a large acreage population. A total of 10 buses transport approximately 80% of students to Kitscoty Elementary school. Kitscoty Junior and Senior High School, located on the edge of town, had 228 students in Grade 7-12 in the 2011-2012 school year. Extensive programming includes Junior and Senior Band, Industrial Arts, Home Economics and French Language instruction. Specialized courses include Drama and Cosmetology, and credits in many of the trades and Fire Fighting are offered through a partnership with Lakeland College. Students can also take classes in Audiovisual Editing, Digital Photography and Computer Technology. Kitscoty has a Sports Performance program that includes a Hockey Academy. In addition to sports, school groups include Students Against Drunk Driving (SADD), Leadership Group, Travel Club, and an after school Drama Club that performs two major productions a year. The schools work closely with the Safe and Caring Community Committee to build anti-bullying campaigns, community pride, and community awareness. The public library with computer access is also located in the school,

In this study, I recognize the significance of formal school structures and supports, such as formal post-secondary options, as reasons that youth may leave rural communities, but I also consider nonformal and adult education (Freire, 1993, 1998; Barkett and Cleghorn, 2007). I include factors such as high school experience and influences of teachers, community members and peers, to understand what may enhance or inhibit youth choices and mobility (Corbett, 2007; Looker, 2001).

Social factors in this thesis include social connections, networks, or supports in the rural community (Looker, 2001; Corbett, 2007). For example, groups in the community organized or school sports teams, 4-H, Scouts, church groups, as well as friends, family, educators, and social networking resources such as the internet or Facebook. Kitscoty has many opportunities for youth, including a dance studio, recreation and clubs. The Kitscoty 4H community newsletter speaks volumes about opportunities for local youth. One local event included skating on a local pond, hot dog roast and chance to socialize between hockey games. The club also hosts the district's annual curling bonspiel at the Kitscoty curling rink. These social connections provide insight into what is available for youth, chances for connection between generations, and how youth and adults perceive these networks.

There is only one church in town. The Kitscoty Community Church replaced the century-old Wesley United Church five years ago. It is listed as Kitscoty Wesley United Church Hall, with 10 other congregations in Lloydminster, and 5 others in Vermilion (Ukrainian Catholic, Pentecostal, Lutheran, Evangelical, Catholic, United, and Presbyterian). The local presence and physical structures of the churches provide insight into the role of faith in rural community life, and an entry point to ask more questions about these aspects of the rural community. In the case of Kitscoty, there is less opportunity to understand if churches compete or cooperate in the local community, but interview participants did mention church in key ways. Faith and church was mentioned very frequently in the open-ended survey responses and interviews. Although it was mentioned much less frequently (if at all) in Kitscoty, one youth

participant in the dialogues spoke about the important role of church and leadership roles with the youth group, and another mentioned going to the nearby larger community to attend church. According to town newsletters, there was a lot of sentiment attached to the old building in Kitscoty, the site of memorable weddings and funerals.   Despite my efforts to connect by telephone, I was not able to connect with current members of the church or their local youth group, or speak about my project with congregation members. I attribute this to busy schedules on the part of the leadership, rather than disinterest in my study or lack of engaging local youth.

Although Kitscoty has a public health and rehabilitation centre (a sub-unit of the East Central Health District) right in the centre of town, like many small communities, it is only open during the week 8-4pm, and the nearest hospital is in a larger community. The closest hospital is in Lloydminster only 22 km away. However, some community members told me they prefer to go to Edmonton for anonymity and extended services. Kitscoty does not have a local newspaper, but events are listed in a community newsletter sent from the town office once a month, or posted on the post office bulletin board.

In this section I provided a profile of Kitscoty and introduce the concept of factors. These social factors, culture, economics, environment and agriculture are intrinsically linked (Westhues, 2003; Swift, Davies, Clarke, and Czerny, 2003; Epp, 2001; and Suzuki, 2005) and provide a basis for understanding rural youth mobility and rural community development. Introduce this way of looking at the rural community landscape and social fabric because it provides insight into the tangible and more subtle impacts that may impact rural youth. I return to these factors in my research questions, and they contribute to understanding of the issues through the survey, interviews, and dialogues.

Summary

I began this chapter with an introduction to community sustainability and rural migration. I provided an overview of the broader political and economic context for this work, highlighting migration and mobility along with resource development as

key factors to consider as push and pull tensions in this work. This perspective is crucial to situate this research on rural community out-migration in a broader context. I discussed rural youth migration in Alberta, and the history that highlights the tradition of community organizing and civic engagement in Alberta, to provide evidence of rural population growth and decline, and why rural communities matter to vital issues like sustaining local economies, agriculture, and food production. There are roles for rural youth and adults in making decisions about community assets and possibilities for resource development, environmental stewardship. By strengthening civic engagement and opportunities for learning within rural communities, it is possible to resist decline of rural areas and explore the importance of youth engagement in rural communities. I concluded with sections on rural identity and potential for return, the impact of youth migration and engagement in rural communities, and a profile of a rural community, Kitscoty, Alberta. An understanding of the rural context and the issues that face rural youth sets the stage for the next steps. By exploring *how* we might build a rural community model that seeks to understand the root causes of youth migration and the impacts on community development, this research can generate strategies for a community-based response that is critical at this time. A different conceptualization of rural community development, built on intergenerational dialogue and the interconnectedness of community-based resources, is possible. This approach positions rural youth and adult mentors' input as paramount to understanding rural youth migration. Their input contributes to a range of possible solutions and alternatives to rural out-migration, and sets the stage for return. The expected outcome of this input is genuine application to future rural policy and practice that extends beyond token involvement of rural community members. Further, the expected outcome is accountability and commitment to policy and practice that truly considers the voices of the rural constituency.

The following chapter provides a theoretical foundation for this research and sets the stage for how I ground the issues of rural out-migration and rural community sustainability with a solid understanding of relevant theory. These theoretical underpinnings provide the foundation for building on these concepts and provide

rationale for the methodological considerations in this study. Ultimately, this foundation for analysis and research provides me with an understanding of how best to construct my research in a manner that considers the voices of the rural community members through this work and research dissertation.

Chapter 3 – Theorizing Community and Community Development

In the previous chapter I provided the context for this study which examines factors contributing to rural youth out-migration and rural community sustainability, and I set the stage to synthesize the key issues identified in the literature regarding rural life. This chapter builds a theoretical framework from which to advance the urgent response to rural youth out-migration needed at a local level, while situating the issues and potential responses within a broader context. From this theoretical base I hope to contribute new knowledge and resources to address rural out-migration by strengthening local rural community resilience. Current research on dialogue and sense of community provide grounding for my study and research design. By emphasizing the connections between youth migration and engagement in rural communities, I will be positioned to investigate how youth and adults might best connect within rural communities for the purpose of contributing to rural community development.

First I describe relevant theories and the major concepts or elements that will help to answer my research questions. I then explain the connection between these theoretical constructs and my thesis objectives, and how they are best suited to examine the issue of rural out-migration. From this theoretical base I will construct a conceptual lens to that serves to focus and position my work and my contribution to the field. The theoretical foundation serves as a platform to analyze the elements of power that underscore a sense of community, social capital that includes trust and reciprocity, and sets the foundation for dialogue and engagement.

The theoretical framework explores four key theories including community development theory; notably *sense of community* theory developed by McMillan and Chavis (1996;1986) and refined by Chavis and Pretty (1999); forms of capital, drawing primarily on the work of Bourdieu (1997;1986) and Putnam (1993, 2000); dialogue and dialogic learning (Bakhtin, 1981;1973; Bruning, Dials, and Shirka; 2008; Freire 1998; 1993/1970; Kent and Taylor; 2002) and conscientization (Freire 1998; 1993/1970; 1985). I will then demonstrate how I apply these theories in the second part of this chapter.

Defining Community and Conceptualizing Community Development

While there is a breadth of scholarship on theories of community that is significant to how communities are understood, developed, and organized (Caton and Larsh, 2000; Kline, 1997; Fuller, Guy and Pletsch, 2001; Macklin, 2008), a comprehensive discussion of all of the theories of community extends beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purpose of this study, I define community broadly in Bhattachararyya's (2004) terms, understanding community as solidarity or a sense of togetherness and shared purpose, with shared identity and norms (p.12). Using language from rural development, the concept of solidarity is well-suited to collaboration that is vital in flourishing rural communities. Accordingly, I take a position that draws on Bhattachararyya's (2004) theory of community development, which focuses on solidarity and agency at the core of community sustainability. For the purpose of this study, I use the terms "community" and "community development" to denote more than a geographical location, and include communities of interest, that may be located in a place. In this sense, I explore the social significance of a place, such as membership, and belonging to a group with shared interests and values. In essence, I explore "why" in a rural community, as well as "where."

While community relates to "place," I extend it to include connections and relationships between groups organized around common values with a sense of cohesion in the rural community. It is the element of the " interconnectedness" between community members that is most relevant to rural out-migration because by examining connections to both people and place we can explore why youth may choose to stay. Next I elaborate on community development theory, and then explain the theoretical underpinnings of a "sense of community" specifically, because the concepts of inclusion, engagement, and participation are most relevant to respond to why youth may feel connected to a rural community through inclusion, and how connections between youth and adults may foster this sense of connection.

Theory on community development and sustainable community indicators is abundant (Kline, 1997; Caton and Larsh, 2000; Fuller, Guy and Pletsch, 2001, and others), but not all of the literature responds to rural Canadians' call for an approach

that recognizes rural communities as distinct from urban Canada (Rural Canadian Partnership, 2004). Although there is some overlap between sense of community and community development, the latter focuses intently on "how" in addition to asking "why". The guiding elements of solidarity and agency help to frame the purpose (collective vision), method (activities, practical and academic approaches), and techniques (resources, tools) for community development (Bhattachararyya, 2004). As he explains, although grassroots community organizing and collective action are important dimensions, it is solidarity and sense of equity that are foundational to the concept of community development because they help to increase capacity for dialogue and inform decision-making about resources and community assets (Bhattachararyya, 2004). *Sense of community* theory (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Chavis and Pretty, 1999) is foundational to this research because it helps to explain how rural communities are organized, who is included in the process of development, and how more community members might be engaged. Sense of community theory builds on the broader body of literature on community development that explores how to strengthening community resiliency that may counter rural out-migration.

Historically, community development has been described as community organizing or locality development and shaped by the field of social work and social planning (Kramer and Specht, 1969; Bhattachararyya, 2004). Geographical space is one element of connection to a rural community as a "place," but the personal element of shared association is crucial to examine connections between generations, and how these ties may counter out-migration. On one hand, community development is described as "a group of people initiating a social action process… to change their economic, social, cultural, and/or environmental situation" (Christenson and Robinson, 1989, p. 14), with attention to neighbourhood and place, while Denise and Harris (1989) include "values, beliefs, goals, purposes, and methods – all of which are concerned with improvement of communities" (p.7). These values are important to understand elements such as participation and engagement that foster a sense of togetherness and contributing to a shared vision. This sense of purpose may increase engagement and provide insight into ways to counter rural out-migration.

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The goal of community development, Bhattachararyya (2004) contends, is to create a concept of community development as a guide, a "charter for actions towards a goal" or a "vision of a kind of social order" that is distinctive in purpose and methodology, while being universal and inclusive in scope (p.9-10). Therefore, a theory of community development will "specify its purpose (goal, rationale), its premises, and its methods" (p.10). The purpose-method-technique approach that Bhattachararyya (24) describes is one that helps to explore in concrete terms some of the actions of rural community development.

Solidarity and agency are core elements of community development, and are intrinsically connected through participation (Bhattachararyya, 2004). This conceptualization of the *purpose* of community development helps to define in more concrete terms the essential elements of community beyond just a place or geographic locality that are central to my research. Although place and locality are important, Bhattachararyya (2004) argues that they are inadequate, and there is a need for what he calls micro and macro-level coordination to counter the erosion of community. The questions he asks inform my own reflections about the elements of engagement and participation in rural communities: Are there more concrete terms to describe community development and to build a case for why engaging in community development is important? The elements of engagement and participation are essential to examine how youth may feel a sense of membership and belonging to a community, or not, and how they might perceive their future.

While rural and small towns may not be cohesive, and the social significance of place has been profoundly impacted by modernity and industrialization, solidarity can be based more on shared interests, membership, or circumstances where place is incidental (faith community, professional community, or union, for example). Other approaches to community development, such as assets-based community development, or ABCD (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993) or social planning initiatives, Bhattachararyya (2004) argues, are examples of tools and techniques, not purposes or methods of community development (p. 10). Other scholars (Giddens, 1987; Sen, 1999) stress that agency is a central element when we consider the purpose of community development. Bhattachararyya (2004) develops this notion

further by defining community with solidarity as a core element. However, a sense of place may also contribute to a sense of belonging and rural identities that help explore rural youth migration. Bhattachararyya (2004) maintains that a "broader concept of community would not prevent us from seeing or developing community where place retains its significance, while freeing us to focus on the widest range of communities" (p.11). He provides evidence of how we might build on Putnam's (1995) usage of social capital as reflecting "networks, trust, and mutual obligation enabling people to take collective measures" or solidarity, and Dukheim's idea of shared identity (p. 12). As Bhattachararyya (2004) concludes:

> Understanding community as solidarity (shared identity and norms) serves to define the concept in a distinctive and intrinsic manner, making it possible to distinguish a community from all other types of social relations. We can say that any social configuration that possesses shared identity and norms is a community. The term is thus freed of the incidental baggage of territoriality, ethnicity or level of industrialization of the economy. (p.12)

In practical terms, engagement and human capacity are a means to agency and solidarity, key elements of community that may strengthen resilience to counter the erosion of communities. While communities were once unified by reliance on hunting and agriculture, Bhattachararyya (2004) provides evidence of foundational scholars such as Polanyi (1944) and others, who argue that shifts to a market economy and commodities contributed to social dislocation, and he asks important questions about what happens to land and labour power.

Community development with agency at the core, on the other hand, means a certain degree of freedom from constraints and Bhattachararyya (2004) develops this idea as a positive response to the disintegration of solidarity. Important to my question about how engagement between generations might lead to deeper understanding of youth choices and migration is the idea that with freedom and agency there is a space for dialogue and inquiry to occur. These elements of freedom and agency set the stage for participation and communication that may strengthen bonds across generations. This guiding definition moves beyond economic terms as the sole focus of community development and includes human aspects of choice, dialogue, and capacity, in other words, a sense of agency. It is the focus on working

with, not *for*, rural community members that makes this approach to community development that highlights the elements of participation and engagement that are central to my research questions. Further, community development with agency and solidarity at the core includes important elements of critical consciousness and an awareness of what we know, or conscientization (Freire, 1973). It recognizes our power to share knowledge, to participate, and to change conditions by "understanding the structure of causes that brought [them] about, and then evolving strategies to mitigate them…" and focuses on community development and participation in order to promote agency "…generating critical consciousness, addressing problems that the affected people 'own' and define, and take active measures to solve" (Bhattachararyya, 2004, p.13). This approach to community development demonstrates that the type of knowledge that one person has in a community has greater impact when combined with others. These elements of participation and shared knowledge maximize the potential for strengthening rural communities. Bhattachararyya's (2004) foundational theory of community development provides a starting point to look at community assets with community members, and understand the elements of *sense of community* theory, which I explore next.

Sense of Community

In Chapter 2, I introduced the importance of connections in understanding rural community development and rural youth migration. A sense of community is a profound feeling of belonging to a place, and is foundational to understand how this sense of belonging may contribute to engagement and participation. In this study, rural community members' feelings refer to both youth and adult perspectives of what it means to belong to a community, and how this connection might impact patterns of out-migration. Chavis and Pretty (1999) build on the seminal work by Chavis and McMillan (1986) to advance the theoretical and methodological application of a Sense of Community in four key areas. I turn now to the roots of sense of community theory.

Sense of community involves elements of relationships or connections with people that are central to rural community development, and may be related to a

geographical or conceptual place. In this way sense of community theory highlights the elements of identity, belonging, and membership that are important components to consider in strengthening community cohesion and exploring the potential for intergenerational mentorship and the issue of rural out-migration. The characteristics of cohesion and stability are essential to building a sense of community (Sousa, 2006; Chaves and Pretty, 1999; Kinston, Mitchell, Florin and Stevenson, 1999). Sousa (2006, p. 86), also points to "a feeling or connection that individuals have with where they live, and the relationships they have established" a position that is critical to exploring relationships between generations. In a rural community, there may be opportunities to relate to others with shared values, and to connect in a secure environment, two key elements that scholars identify as contributing to a sense of community (Sousa, 2006; Kingston, Mitchell, Florin and Stevenson, 1999). McMillan and Chavis (1986) provide theoretical grounding to understand the connections that exist in communities and describe a sense of community in these terms: "Sense of Community is 1) a feeling that members have of belonging, 2) a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and 3) a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p.9).

Elements of belonging, membership and integration offer insight into why youth may feel they belong and why they might choose to stay and be involved in civic life within a rural community. In simple terms, the four elements that make up the sense of community that McMillan and Chavis (1986) postulate include 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration; and 4) fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. The first aspect of sense of community, membership, includes five attributes: boundaries, emotional safety, a sense of belonging and identification, personal investment, and a common symbol system. McMillan added the element of "spirit" of community in 1996 to express a sense of the soul of a community (Wright, 2004). Boundaries may include language, dress, or symbolism and ceremony, while a sense of security and belonging or acceptance is also critical. The second attribute, influence, is of particular interest to this research because it relates to the notion of agency, which was identified in the previous section as being a core element of community development (Bhattachararyya, 2004). Influence is "bidirectional" or

reciprocal meaning that "members of a group must feel empowered to have influence over what a group does" to feel motivated to participate and the "group cohesiveness depends on the group having some influence over its members" with power in the group stemming from those members who acknowledge the needs, values and opinions of others (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p.2).

The importance of influence as an attribute relates directly to the previous discussion and theory of community development because the sense that one's participation matters is essential to civic engagement and demonstrates Bhattachararyya's (2004) emphasis on solidarity and agency to strengthen communities. A discussion of trust, power and authority is critical and is expanded later in this chapter, where "order, authority, and justice create an atmosphere for the exchange of power (1996, p.319). The third element, integration and fulfillment of needs, is useful to describe what is desired and valued (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p.2). In other words, this theory is imperative to understand the ways in which members of a group might be rewarded or acknowledged for their participation in a community. If youth feel that they have a voice and the power to contribute to collective action as Bhattachararyya (2004) describes, there is increased potential to be involved and create the type of community in which they choose to live, for example informing decisions about local resources.

Relationships and links between generations may serve to counter out-migration by strengthening a sense of belonging and connection. Sense of community theory provides a way to examine, further question, and explain the links or relationships between community members. This theory supports the importance of rural identity and belonging to a community. Engaging in meaningful interactions, experiencing rewards or a sense of community spirit, and sharing in an event may strengthen solidarity and agency that contribute to rural community development. These features build a sense of community for rural youth that may impact their engagement in community life and provide them with a sense of purpose. The interdependence and relationships between community members that are inherent in McMillan and Chavis's (1986) sense of community theory are crucial elements to understand the potential for shared emotional bonds and intergenerational

connections in rural communities to foster supportive communication and explore issues. McMillan extends the concept of "sense of community" to include the ideas of "searching for similarities" as an essential element of community development, and "creating an economy of social trade" (1996, p.322). The idea of shared emotional connection includes seven features: 1) contact hypothesis – or the idea that greater personal interaction increases the potential for bonds between community members; 2) quality of interaction; 3) closure to events, or resolved tasks; 4) increased importance of a shared event – for example, a community challenge can facilitate a group bond (such as building a playground in a rural community); 5) investment – the community becomes more important to those who have put time and energy into it; 6) effect of honour or humiliation on community members – a reward in front of the community increases a sense of community, while losing face is a barrier; and 7) a spiritual bond – the concept of community spirit or soul (1986, p.3). The elements of engagement and reward help to explain how youth might be encouraged to stay and participate in rural communities.

The relationships that are a key part of Sense of Community theory relate to both the geographical concept of community (rural community, neighborhood, town and surrounding farms, for example) as well as relational concepts concerned with the "quality of character of human relationship" that may be familiar, professional, or spiritual, for example, without the limits of location (p. 8.). While Bhattachararyya (2004) argues that the elements of solidarity and agency develop the idea of community beyond the notion of place, relations with the land or geography and between people are vital links to understanding out-migration from rural areas. Scholars stress, however, the importance of dynamic interconnections between the four elements (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Wright, 2004). The intersections highlighted in the theory are valuable to understand the importance of the quality of relationships and connections between generations of youth and adults.

A limit to the sense of community theory (McMillan and Chavis, 1986) is that it does not seem to account directly for gender or class, and how these factors may impact participation, education and community relations. Gender and class may impact rural community members' perceptions of what is possible, and the choices

that young people make. For example, the expectations on female and male community members may be very different in terms of whether or not they stay, leave, or return, and the messages that they receive in the community about possible life paths and opportunities. These messages about opportunities or limits may also relate to social class. Gender and class may be viewed through the lens of sense of community theory, and may be informed by other scholarship and feminist perspectives such as Lather (1992, 1991), Luke (1996, 1992) and Easthope and McGowan (1992) for deeper analysis. Although a thorough gender and class analysis within the context of rural communities is beyond the scope of this study, I will expand on this analysis as it relates to my research questions in subsequent chapters. The following discussion focuses on the importance of local knowledge and assets.

Recognition of local knowledge and assets is an essential part of developing a sense of community. An understanding of the various assets within a rural community helps to explore the skills, resources, and tangible items that we want to keep, build upon and sustain for future generations (Fuller, Guy and Pletsch, 2001). These assets also serve as resources for proposing solutions to community-based problems (Fuller, et al., 2001). In my study, an understanding of assets, including a strong connection to place, kinship ties, local knowledge and local skills such as food production, are important to counter some of the challenges within a rural community context. Further, an understanding of local knowledge and these assets is vital for community members to conceptualize how they might be involved in decision-making about these aspects of their lives.

An understanding of community assets is especially important to my research questions as I seek a deeper understanding of how rural community youth and adults communicate about the social, environmental and political dimensions of their community and how this might translate into decision-making power. Epp (2001) encapsulates these dimensions of community and decision-making as a political re-skilling of rural areas. However, how do community members learn these skills of participation, and who is able to participate in rural community life? The application of community development theory is notable here. If the idea of community can be understood through concepts of solidarity and agency (Bhattachararyya, 2004);

place, locality, geography or territory (Berry, accessed 2009; Gruenewald, 2008; Wotherspoon, 1998) or a sense of attachment or belonging (Orr, 2004), what does that theory mean in practical terms - day to day - for rural community members? In my research design, I consider the types of questions, and who to ask to explore these ideas. In the next section I discuss forms of capital, focusing on social capital.

Community-Based Forms of Capital and Understanding Relationships

The previous section on sense of community theory and the integrated nature of community highlighted the various elements that connect people in rural communities and set the stage for examining the ideas of membership, belonging, and networks within communities. It is here that an understanding of forms of capital becomes important to examine the connections and sense of cohesion in a community. In this section I discuss forms of capital, (Bourdieu, 1986) focusing on the concepts of social capital and cultural capital. I will then illustrate how this theory is essential to frame my research and to understand the factors, especially the social and inherently political aspects of community life, which may impact engagement, a process of dialogue, and rural community out-migration.

Power, cohesion, and relationships built on trust and reciprocity are important elements to understand rural community development, and how forms of capital impact rural communities. Bourdieu's (1986) theory on forms of capital includes social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital. This theory on forms of capital connects community with forms of power, and helps to account for the structures and functions of society beyond economic terms. Capital is defined broadly as "accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its 'incorporated,' embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor" (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural capital can be embodied and explained as "external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus"; it can be objectified (for example, value accumulated from objects, machines, instruments, books, etc.) or institutionalized (for example, educational credentials). Symbolic capital can refer to

any form of capital, as long as it is represented. Different forms of capital, argues Bourdieu (1986) can be derived from economic capital, but this takes effort to transform or convert, and at the heart of the matter is power – "power effective in the field in question". Bourdieu (1986) focuses attention on the value and time it takes to accumulate social and cultural capital. The power in question and how these forms of capital impact rural community development are most important to explore the relationships and bonds in rural communities that may enhance or hinder youth engagement. Social capital is the form of capital that helps to understand the resources, networks, and trust that impact rural communities. Social capital shapes social and institutional interactions, and the bonds between community members and generations.

Social capital as a concept has roots in sociology and political science (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1994, 1998; and Putnam, 1993, 2000) and explains why citizens may cooperate and take collective action (Lochner, Kawachi, and Kennedy, 1999; Smith, 2009). Various definitions of social capital exist (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1994, 1998; and Putnam, 1993, 2000; World Bank, 1999), but overall the concept relates to the resources, trust and networks that are constitutive of social capacity (Bourdieu, 1986, 1997; Jary and Jary, 2000; Smith, 2009). Bourdieu's description of social capital includes the "the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" Bourdieu 1983, p. 249), as noted previously, while to Coleman (1994) it is defined by its function "…not a single entity, but a variety of different entities, having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure" (p. 302). Even the World Bank draws on social capital to describe the "institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions... Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together" (The World Bank, 1999; Smith, 2009).

Rural communities are strengthened by social capital because the bonds that contribute to capacity, connection, and empowerment help to build trust that is

essential to healthy rural communities. Putnam's (2000) application of social capital recognizes the connections among individuals that include social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.   In this sense social capital has the potential to counter isolation by connecting community members in a network with reciprocal social relations. In that sense, social capital is closely associated with what might be called "civic virtue" (Smith, 2009). The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a network of reciprocal social relations (Putnam 2000). An understanding of the social capital is important to rural community development because while these networks can build capacity, connection, and empowerment, and the essential elements of community development – solidarity and agency - stressed in the previous section (Bhattachararyya, 2004), they may also be exclusive and divide communities. Although Bourdieu's (1986) theory of social capital provides a foundation for this work, it is often critiqued as being limited to perpetuating the power and privilege that already exists within a society. While it is important to ask questions about who is benefitting, rural community development relies on networks based on solidarity that strengthen bonds between community members with a focus on inclusion and equity.

Social Capital in Rural Communities

The value of social capital to rural communities is perhaps best understood by how networks based on relationships and shared values are mobilized for action. These networks may be within a community and may extend beyond the community to broader society to advance developmental goals (Barraket, 2005, p.75). For example, there is value in parents' groups and associations, while *social inclusion*, or the improved access to social capital for groups that have been excluded from the social life (Jary and Jary, 2000), may address some of the imbalances of power and privilege in a rural community.   Scholars define the concept of social capital as a "collective dimension of society external to the individual…the feature of a social structure, not the individual actors within the social structure" (Lochner, et al, 1999, p. 260). Social capital based on trust, and relationships between family and groups (Roseland, 1999) is critical to the key issues of rural community development and

community building, including the individual, but extending beyond individual social networks and support to the broader community and beyond. Putnam (2000) emphasizes that "[n]etworks and norms might…benefit those who belong - to the detriment of those who do not. Social capital might be most prevalent among groups of people who are already the most advantaged, thereby widening political and economic inequalities between those groups and others who are poor in social capital" (p. 9). Therefore, Putnam (2000) argues that social capital can be beneficial by building trust and reciprocity that contributes to overall health of a community, but one must ask who is included or excluded in participating, and to what type of society is this social capital contributing?

The concepts of bridging and linking in social capital are related to the issue of rural out-migration because they include social networks or resources that extend beyond the immediate community (see Macklin, 2008; Field, 2003; Dale, 2005; Smith, 2009). Woolcock (2001) provides helpful distinctions between the forms of social capital. While *bonding social capital* denotes ties between people in similar situations, such as immediate family, close friends and neighbours, *bridging social capital* encompasses more distant ties of like persons, such as loose friendships and workmates, and *linking social capital* connects more unlike people in dissimilar situations, such as those who are entirely outside of the community, thus enabling members to leverage a far wider range of resources than are available in the community (p. 13).

Bridging social capital can connect community members within their community through networks, and bridge beyond the individual needs to achieve collective goals (Dale, 2005). Social capital theory can also help to understand rural out-migration and rural community assets. An example of how this works might be a several rural communities in the same municipality working together to hire a youth resiliency worker to work with youth and provide summer programs or coordinate sports tournaments and homework clubs. Another example is local farmers and community members rallying together raise more than $1.2 million to purchase the Westlock, Alberta grain terminal as a community owned venture and create a successful New Generation Cooperative (Bernas and Reimer, 2011). As Bernas and

Reimer (2011) explain, the experience of Westlock Terminals has lessons to offer communities faced with the loss of major economic assets. In Westlock, community members are working together to benefit their community and their region, which has broader social and economic benefits. In the following section I discuss this in more detail.

Community members are responding to the broader social issue of rural out-migration that impacts everyone through closures of schools and health centers, losses of local business and decline in local agriculture. Rural out-migration extends beyond the immediate borders of a community and impacts rural regions and urban centers. The challenges and solutions require an approach that benefits from the bridging power of social capital. Forms of capital, and specifically social capital including concepts of trust, cooperation, bridging, bonding, and social inclusion, helps to explain why it is important to understand relationships such as local connections and networks as factors that impact the patterns of rural youth out-migration. Social capital theory explains why and how these connections might come about and how they may influence interactions at the local level. My study demonstrates the importance of fostering bonds between generations to empower community members by strengthening these bonds to connect youth and adults within or between rural communities. From this standpoint, potential barriers or exclusion can be explained through social capital theory to understand community supports with an intergenerational perspective.

Social capital serves as lens to explore how these relationships in rural communities might be renegotiated to be reciprocal, and contribute to democracy, civic participation, and the social health of a community (Putnam, 2000). As Putnam (2000) illustrates, social capital can contribute to social trust and harmony, but it can also exclude community members from participating in civic society.   The youth interviewed in the study "Rural Youth: Stayers, leavers and return migrants" provide evidence for why an understanding of the forms of capital is critical and why trust matters (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002). Participants cite the messages that they hear from adults, and their connections within the community as a key to their sense of belonging and feeling that their contributions and their opinions matter. This

relates directly to McMillan and Chavis (1986) *sense of community* theory that stresses participation, and community development theory that recognizes the importance of agency and inclusion (Bhattachararyya, 2004). Next I explore the messages that youth receive about participating in rural community life by looking at messages that youth receive. I link participation and inclusion back to forms of capital by considering how social and cultural capital may impact participation in rural communities.

Rural youth say that being part of social networks, receiving mentorship and receiving welcoming, supportive messages in the community are important factors in why they may choose to stay in a rural area (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000). Messages that youth receive are an important aspect of their identity, and social capital is an important part of strengthening social networks. Building relationships across generations in a broad sense is important because it provides opportunities to explore factors that may influence youth staying or leaving rural areas. These connections between youth and adults are not explicitly explored in scholarly literature. The areas for further exploration include forms of capital, such as social and cultural capital, connections between youth decision-making and their social networks, and social cohesion. Corbett's (2007) emphasis on the importance of linking economy, social networks, and identity underscores the importance of social capital theory as an important consideration for this study. Further, social capital (Putman, 2000; Bourdieu, 1986) provides a theoretical platform from which to view links and connections – both formal and non-formal – within a rural community. Social capital, especially as it relates to the power of networks and the personal investment one has in a place or community, is highly relevant to rural communities. This form of capital may be a source of exclusion, for example, gaining a position of power through networks. In contrast, Putnam illustrates the positive impact of social capital to build healthy communities and promote civic engagement (2000).

Bourdieu's notion of forms of capital (1986) is relevant to understanding rural community connections and forms of power, which I explore in greater detail later. For example, *cultural capital* or non-financial social assets (for example, intellectual or educational assets) might impact social mobility or opportunity.

This *capital* can help explain the complex connections between youths' belonging, identity, place, space, and mobility (Bourdieu, 1986; Corbett, 2007). The concept of forms *of capital* is highly relevant to understanding youths' choices in a resource-based economy such as Alberta, because capital in this sense extends beyond economy terms. The relational aspects of social capital are most relevant to my research. For example, Corbett's analysis of social and cultural capital addresses the importance of social networks and the messages that youth receive in a rural community, while showing that tensions and contradictions exist in these messages.

Analysis of social capital by Corbett (2007) describes why on the one hand rural communities are considered by youth to be safe, secure places to live, on the other hand, they may still not be perceived as a place to sustain or enhance their working lives. Drawing on Putnam's (1993, 2000) theories of social capital, provides a basis for analysis with an emphasis on relationships and bonds based on reciprocity. One example is Corbett's (2007) research that illustrates the power of social capital, especially between families or those who share resources, knowledge, and a profound connection to the local industry (fishing, in the case of Atlantic Canada) within a rural community. The power of social capital as it relates to family connections helps to illustrate why some young people might stay in the rural community, and not leave to pursue formal education or employment elsewhere. It also helps to explain that these connections do not benefit everyone in the community. While education is often perceived as necessary to succeed outside of the community, formal education may not be a priority for those who stay, despite local economic uncertainty.

Theories of social and cultural capital help to explore how choices for youth may be perceived or expressed, based on social networks. From this starting point, I examine who has influence and power within a rural community. Sherman and Sage (2011) explain that in some rural communities, the most talented youth are "funneled" out of rural communities in search of more vibrant labour markets and opportunities elsewhere, but they also stress how an individual and family conceives of education and its importance has an influence on youth. How an individual or family view education is impacted by a number of factors. These factors include "their own levels of education, employment status, attachment to the place and its

people, and moral standing within the community" (Sherman and Sage, p.1). In other words, youth decisions to stay leave, or return may be influenced by social and cultural capital. This exploration leads to additional questions of why these power dynamics exist in the first place, and how we might better understand the roots and impact of these relationships within a rural community. Thus, an understanding of this theory has important implications for rural community development, education, and policy that impacts rural areas. It informs an analysis of why and how youth choose to stay, leave or return to a rural community. In the next section I introduce power and privilege as it relates to rural communities.

Power and Privilege in Rural Communities

Inherent in the discourse on forms of capital there is a question of power and privilege. Power relations within a rural community may serve to perpetuate who is included and who is excluded in community life. These key theoretical perspectives will help to explain the systemic power imbalances within rural communities. They provide a basis for analyzing youth and adult connections within a rural setting and how these connections may contribute to recognizing, and perhaps understanding how power and privilege impact the rural community members. They highlight whose voices are heard, and aid in understanding why youth may choose to stay, leave, or return. I view power as inherent in community members, and while power can be used to repress, it can be exercised or expressed in the choices that youth and adults make to be involved and to have their voices heard. In this way, it is omnipresent, rather than something that youth need to "get" or that some members need to "give" to others. However, an awareness of how power can be wielded in obvious or subtle ways for influence is important to this study. Next I discuss power as it relates to voices of influence. Whether they are real or perceived, messages from peers, parents, or leaders within the community are persuasive and may be highly influential as youth make their decisions.

First, power, or "capacity to influence future behavior," as it is defined by Gastil (1993) can support collaboration in rural communities:

> …power [is] the capacity to influence the future behavior or objects or the behavior, beliefs, and emotions of living beings, including oneself. One can

use power to do something, or prevent or delay something from being done…power resides in both individuals and groups. Individuals have the power to accomplish things by themselves, but sometimes an individual's power is inconsequential unless combined with the power of others (p.17).

Collectiveness and collaboration are at the heart of power that can build up, rather than fracture rural communities. Community members, educators, and researchers, should ask: How does this power influence future behavior? In what ways is this power or capacity used for action or reflection? What are some of the costs or benefits to how this power or influence is applied in individual or collective ways? In this sense, power is productive and never "out there". Rather, it can be expressed through many seemingly inconsequential daily interactions and choices. Whose knowledge counts and how does that play out in the rural community? Critical research and education with community interests in mind will continue to inquire across relationships that are economic, political, and cultural as well as social (Apple, 2004) and consider whose knowledge and ways of knowing are considered legitimate or 'official'? Whose knowledge is not? How is power constituted and how do we think about it?" (Apple, 2004, p.2-3). Power is an essential part of education (Boler, 2004; Morrow and Torres, 2002; Vella, 2004), if we broaden the empirical and conceptual notion of power to question intersections of class, gender, race, age politics, and other dynamics of power, and to get at the root of who benefits from the ways in which our communities or societies are organized (Apple, 2004).

Most relevant to my research is the relationship between people (and the systems) within rural communities and broader society. A more conscious explanation of these dynamics and systems provide a pathway for understanding why youth are engaged in the community, or why they are not involved in rural community life, and how increase opportunities for youth to express their agency in decision-making, civic engagement, and political process within a rural community. Further, becoming more conscious involves a shift to recognize that individuals can have more power in their own lives, and that they have the capacity to impact social change (Fletcher, 2009). Another important consideration is that power lies in collective will, actions, and decisions, and power can enhance individual or collective capacity without harming others (Gastil, 1993, p.17). In this way, exercising power is

an expression of action or agency, and does not have to imply alienation, dominance, marginalization, or silencing. In other words, a post structural idea of power can be more carefully explored through intergenerational dialogue that has immense potential to open spaces for voices to be heard and for youth and adults to become personally and politically engaged.

Entrenched power and privilege at the community level emphasizes the notions of domination and social difference, and underscores that we are not an equal society (Apple, 1999). How then might we shift the focus to the social and political rights of those who may be excluded from rural community debate, including rural youth? Whose voices are heard in a rural community? Who has influence on important dynamics in community life, or essential decisions that impact rural community futures, like whether youth choose to stay or leave? These questions are critical to me as a researcher. I can begin to understand them through the theoretical lens of power and its impacts on community, and in consultation with rural community youth and adults.

Power and agency are an important foundation in community involvement. Empowerment is built on inclusion and integration, and is a process that Taylor (2003) states includes three key elements including 1) political awareness and the ability to make decisions that impact our own lives; 2) availability of options or choices to meet our needs, and 3) the opportunity to exercise rights, responsibility, and citizenship. In other words, in a rural community this includes community members being aware of their power to make decisions that impact their lives. It also includes opportunities to engage in the community, and options to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens and access resources. In other words, understanding how power and privilege are expressed and challenged in a rural community is important because it may impact who is empowered to participate in the community, and whose voices are heard.

The concept of power reveals questions of whose voices are heard in a community, whose words are silenced, and how rural community members understand their own agency or the ability to act. While social capital and

connections within a community may contribute positively to building trust and participation, these connections can also exclude or inhibit members from participating when power becomes a key source of the capital. This notion of voice and the inherent power of being heard and eliciting a response from others may best be understood by looking again at Putnam's (2000) understanding of social capital. It is necessary to question the society and the type of community we aim to build. How are social capital (Putnam, 2000, p.9) and forms of power evident in a rural community? Listening to the voices of rural youth and adults is a way to move beyond silence and focus on interconnectedness between community members. It is a way of challenging dominant power structures and open spaces to hear marginalized voices – focusing on agency and empowerment (Li Li, 2004).

Bringing issues of power and privilege to the fore has inherent limits, risks and possibilities. First, there are benefits to power, including a say in decisions that impact one's life in a rural community, such as how local resources are distributed, decisions about recreation facilities, or who is on local council. Being part of decision that impact rural community members is what it means to be part of a democratic process. However, the limits and risks of not feeling empowered or having one's voice heard or to be included mean that decisions may be made without one's interests, or the rural community's best interests in mind. In a subsequent chapter I explore ways of conceptualizing power and privilege in rural communities, and how these relate to rural youth migration and rural community development.

Up to this point I described the theoretical foundations of community and community development, including sense of community and civic engagement. I highlighted the importance of recognizing local knowledge and assets in rural communities. I elaborated on concepts of power and privilege, because the ways in which young people and adults might engage together and participate in rural community life are examples of how power might be distributed. I now turn to participation and engagement to explore the powerful ways that community members can develop a common understanding and work together to respond to issues within their rural communities. A review of the existing literature indicates a need for a framework that is intergenerational, and can build on other theoretical constructs such

as sense of community, social capital, power, and engagement. It is engaging youth that is central to my study. What have been missing in previous studies are the voices of youth together with adults when addressing issues like rural youth out-migration and community development. My research builds on the theoretical foundations of youth engagement to address this need.

Theoretical Foundations of Youth Engagement

Youth are often told what to do, or are involved in community processes in what Freechild Organization (2011) considered to be "token" participation. Listening to youth and engaging with them in dialogue is a very different starting point and could lead to positive youth engagement. Youth engagement is "the meaningful participation and sustained involvement" in an activity or in community life (Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2010). Dagnino's (2009) work provides insight that sets the stage for using dialogue to engage youth and adults as an important component of my data collection. Engagement is central to my methodology that emphasizes the value of learning from lived experiences, interpreting those experiences together with participants, and constructing knowledge together. Youth engagement also contributes to strengthening local skills and capacity building, decision-making and social responsibility that contribute to building resilient communities.

Youth engagement involves encouraging youth to critically analyze their identity to develop a politicized understanding of themselves as individuals and their position in society. This increased understanding of self-awareness and a shift to social awareness leads to concepts of citizenship and how youth can affect barriers or challenges and develop skills to positively impact their own lives (Dagnino, 2009). The emphasis on capacity building and decision-making are central to strengthening rural communities, and are consistent with Fletcher's (2009) *Measure of social change led by and with young people*, and Hart's (1992) continuum of youth involvement Fletcher and Dagnino connect their work more directly with practical applications to youth organizations, and boards of directors or organizations that want to build youth-adults partnerships. These examples serve as maps for how one might

engage youth and adults in rural communities. Key elements within this field of youth engagement research that inform my own work include an emphasis on youth having a voice as a partner rather than recipient, and the importance of youth skill development to participate in political processes and have decision-making power.

Youth and adult partnership are essential for sustainable rural community development. Adults have a wealth of experience, but both youth and adults benefit from training and support. Work and power can be shared, and there is a need to balance expectations that are realistic but aim high in adult-youth partnerships (Dagnino, 2009). While previous work maintains that adults have skills, knowledge and expertise to share with youth, I emphasize that this exchange of skills, knowledge and life experiences goes both ways - it is reciprocal. While youth perhaps have less breadth or length of experience, critical knowledge can be shared by a younger generation. In youth and adult partnerships, the focus is outside of the individual, and can include sports, arts, music, volunteer work, or social activism, and it can occur in different settings or contexts. Adult partnership or support is a key element. This might include structure and encouragement, though the youth themselves are participating, leading, organizing, advocating, and evaluating. The definition of youth engagement that I use for this study draws from Dagnino (2009), as I outline below, and is informed by Freechild Organization (2011), the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (2010), and Heartland (2008). It is rooted in theory (Pancer and Pratt, 1999; Pancer, Rose-Krasnor and Loiselle, 2002; Mahoney, Schweder and Stattin, 2002; Nakamura, 2001) and draws on lessons learned from groups engaged with youth in practice (see Rural Roots at http://www.changeforchildren.org and the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement web-site, at www.engagementcentre.ca). I have gained further insight on engagement and the importance of partnership by working with youth and adults in this study.

There are four key elements to youth engagement (Dagnino, 2009). In addition to involving youth in decision-making, youth engagement fosters active citizenship and develops social awareness through programs or initiatives that instill a sense of social responsibility. Youth engagement creates spaces for youth to be active in

relation to the issues and challenges that affect youth and community.   The four elements of youth engagement are relevant to the rural context:

1) Skill development and capacity building. In the rural context, youth programs that are organized by and for youth may include youth development programs, or activities that aim to develop civic, economic, social and cultural competence. In Kitscoty, for example, the youth resiliency worker organizes activities for the youth, with youth consultation and input into the programming;

2) Leadership and decision-making. "Leadership" in the youth engagement context means that youth have decision-making power. They may have power to determine the direction and content of their own programs or, more broadly, engaging youth to become active in the issues that impact their lives. Dialogue provides the opportunity for youth to take leadership roles and be involved in decision making processes;

3) Critical analysis. Youth are encouraged to develop a critical analysis. Youth and adult community members may develop a deeper understanding of themselves and their position in society. As Dagnino (2009) emphasizes, once youth develop a politicized understanding of themselves, they are able to make the link to the systemic factors that affect their community and society at large and connect their understanding of their own identity with community and society;

4) Developing a sense of social responsibility. The transition from self-awareness to social awareness leads youth to reflect on the responsibilities of citizenship. Youth are encouraged to consider what they can do to affect the barriers and challenges in their lives, and build skills to instigate positive changes in their community (Dagnino, 2009). Dialogue has the potential to link adults and youth together in this learning and development.

Youth engagement is a central component to exploring the issue of youth out-migration. In the previous sections I outlined tenets of youth engagement. Engagement is important in my research to understand the types of messages youth receive, and how communication occurs in rural communities, to understand the rural Alberta context, and to develop my research questions and methodology. It is significant that youth engagement is considered a priority in social and economic

community participation at the core of future planning (TORC, 2007; Freechild, 2009; Alberta Government, 2005). Alberta's commitment to linking rural and urban sectors so that all communities can benefit from provincial policy is clearly articulated in planning documents (Alberta Government, 2005). Further, the importance of communication and connections between generations in rural areas, such as plans to maintain connections with the family farm, is prominently outlined by Boggs et al. (2005). Additional connections are evident between the issue of rural out-migration and young people's sense of identity and purpose in their own communities (Corbett, 2005; 2007).

Social and political engagement, that encourages broad participation and a sense of place (Epp, 2001) are central to my research questions about how intergenerational connections might enhance youth engagement, strengthen youth connections to their rural community, and factors that might counter youth out-migration. The literature on youth engagement theory, combined with the theoretical foundations of *sense of community* theory and social capital theory, provide rationale to include social and economic factors in my research questions. Epp's (2001) exploration of the concept of a shared history or shared memories will inform the questions I ask rural youth and adults and their community. The power of intergenerational connections to create these links brings the need for theories of youth engagement, dialogue, community and social capital to the fore. This shared sense of the rural community provides a reason to foster engagement as well as a method for this exploration. Engaging youth and adults together is a way to explore the importance of a shared sense of history and place. These theoretical concepts provide rationale for an intergenerational framework for my study which I will develop in greater detail.

There is a critical need for current research that emphasizes a strategy to involve youth at all levels of decision-making (see for example Dagnino, 2009). Youth have previously been excluded from the process of community development, or have not been included as equal partners in the process. Engagement between young people and adults provides an opportunity to participate in rural life and explore issues together. Although previous literature explores tangible methods to

implement local and global education in a rural community context, and emphasises a sense of place or "place-based" education (Goldstein & Selby, 2000; Orr; 2004), it is not clear how this learning engages youth and adults together with a focus on education that is cooperative, non-formal and builds on their local knowledge and experience. Local learning strengthens rural communities, and addresses the foundations of power by sharing it across generations. This connection moves beyond the theoretical discourse to generate practical and empirical applications. Some examples might be mentorship between generations for training and employment, starting a social enterprise, and intergenerational connections to understand rural youth migration or provide alternatives to counter the problem of rural out-migration.

By connecting youth and adults to assess the impact of the social, political, and economic realities of building healthy rural communities, an intergenerational initiative reflects principles that draw on feminist theory and progressive education philosophies prominently articulated by scholars (Lather, 1991, 1992; Luke, 1996; Luke and Gore, 1992). This feminist scholarship provides theoretical and practical insight for being inclusive, with respect for gender, diversity and equity. It emphasizes local knowledge, and active, engaged citizenship, through collaboration, partnership, and working collectively to constructively address tensions. One way of examining migration, and specifically who participates and in what ways in rural community life, is by exploring these questions across generations. Dialogue sets the stage to move beyond discussion to explore creative aspects of problem-solving, building, and change. The potential to co-construct knowledge and policy with rural community members creates opportunities to build theory with participants about rural youth out-migration and rural community development. In the next section I focus on dialogue, building on participation and engagement in rural communities. Dialogue is both a process and way of mobilizing this theory into action, and sets the stage to address my research questions more fully in my discussion and analysis. I turn now to theory on dialogue.

Grounding Dialogue in Theory

In this section I explore dialogue from a theoretical perspective as well as how it is understood in practice. Dialogue can be used as a learning model to empower and engage youth and adults in their rural community context. Theories such as dialogic learning and conscientization provide ways to explore how connections between generations might strengthen youth engagement in rural communities. For example, how might dialogue inform youth participation and engagement, and in what ways might this reciprocal form of communication contribute to conscientization and strengthen connections within rural communities? Participation and engagement are key elements that might counter out-migration from rural areas or increase opportunities for youth to return. The theories of dialogue and conscientization contribute to our understanding of how a sense of community, is developed through membership and inclusion. For example, dialogue in its truest sense shifts the power relations so that the focus is on including and engaging participants to untangle concepts and ideas and work together on a process of understanding and possibilities of change (see Vella, 2004). Learning through dialogue in a rural community has the power to include, rather than exclude rural community members in community life.

Building understanding and communication between individuals is part of the process of dialogue that combines elements of the social setting, text and context. In this sense, dialogue is unifying and builds a foundation of trust. It creates spaces for those who may be excluded, repressed, or marginalized. The theoretical history on dialogue and dialectic dates back to Socrates and the Greek notion of dialogos, "meaning a conversation, discussion, or argument" (Avoseh, 2005). The Russian philosopher Bakhtin's (1981, 1973) theory of dialogue emphasized the power of discourse to enhance our understanding of multiple meanings and create possibilities. As Panchappa explains, Bakhtin's idea was that "We own meaning". Meaning is therefore rooted in the social discourse but developed or framed by the participants (Panchappa, 2011). Communication can be non-verbal, and based on context. For example, in a rural community meeting, in addition to what is being verbalized, there are factors that impact the text and context of communication. Communication is shaped by the historical and cultural contexts of the town, as well as the unspoken

understandings based on inside knowledge about a place and its members.   The idea of intertextuality, or the interplay between language and context in a rural community context. There is power in including youth and adults in a process that focuses on creating a space to listen to various voices to learn about what matters to them in their community.

Dialogue is active, interactive, and engaged. Participation and relationship building are key elements in dialogue, and participation has been linked with positive outcomes (Bruning, Dials, and Shirka, 2008).   Rural communities will benefit from member input that is based on elements of collaboration and equity in all aspects of community life, from politics to event planning, to participation on sports teams. Kent and Taylor's (2002) conceptualization of dialogue as public engagement includes five overarching elements of a dialogic theory that are relevant to my work: 1) *mutuality*, that focuses on collaboration and equity (p. 25); 2) *propinquity*, assuming community members are willing and able to articulate demands and willing to consult on public matters that impact diverse parties; 3) *empathy*, the "atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed" (p. 27); 4) *risk*, recognizing that unexpected and uncontrolled outcomes may occur; and 5) *commitment*, a genuineness, commitment to conversation, and commitment to interpretation of the parties in the relationship. These are important components, but the language is slightly different when applied to a rural community context as it relates to this study. For example, in the second element, *propinquity*, there is a sense that the public is being consulted, or managed, rather than equal participants in the process.

At the heart of theories of dialogic learning are Paulo Freire's ideas of education as it applies to adult education and community contexts. Education is a practice of freedom with dialogue central to the process (Freire, 1970/1994). "Dialogue, when it is a liberatory praxis, is comprised of limit-acts that transcend, transfer, or over-come limit situations" (Glass, 2004, p.17), while "[n]either a critical knowledge of reality (especially socioeconomic structures and other major elements of the dominant ideology) nor language and speech that refine that reality, are sufficient to change that reality without their being linked to the concrete struggle to

transform the given situation" (Glass, 2004, 17). Dialogue is important to rural community organizing because it is a reciprocal form of communication and shared knowledge. Dialogue builds on the idea that there is no expert, but community members learn together as educators and learners. This theoretical stance is in contrast to a learning model where an educator is an expert who always has the one correct answer. Dialogic theory as it applies to learning explains how community members might learn through a process of information exchange and communication based on questions and response, which may then lead to action (Freire, 1970; Flecha, 2000; Wink, 2000). There is inherent power in this process.

Freire's (1970) theory extends beyond dialogic learning and emphasizes the potential for social transformation through education that is firmly positioned in dialogue. He refers to this as "dialogic action". This theoretical stance is relevant to rural community contexts because it emphasizes growth and potential for change. It adds depth to learning and recognizes the ways in which rural youth may draw connections between their experiences, our actions, and their consequences. Growth is what education should promote and support (Dewey, 1980). Freire (1970) and Vella (2004) emphasize that true dialogue unveils truths about the world through interaction and discussion. Ultimately, dialogue can lead to conscientization. In a rural community, in other words, the concept of dialogue extends beyond conversation to consider possible strategies for recognizing that learners are participants with understandings of their context and the agency to address inequalities through critical reflection and action.

Learning through dialogue sets the stage to balance power, rather than arguing or enforcing ideas from a position of power, and context is important (Wells, 1999; Wink, 2000). In practice, dialogue theory supports a learning environment that encourages interaction and collaboration. Context is important to dialogue because it is significant to understanding interaction and how communication occurs between individuals and within the context of their broader community. Applied in a rural community, a dialogue process is more than a conversation. Instead, it is about unpacking the tensions by communicating back and forth about ideas and values, and then rooting arguments or claims in evidence from real life, with the potential for

action and change. In this way, education becomes a process by which we examine our frames of reference to be more inclusive, and as Mezirow (2000) contends, to "generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide actions" (p.7).

While dialogue provides a tool to recognize and analyze the imbalances of power or authority between research participants, it is critical to acknowledge that such dynamics exist. To summarize, dialogue is a method to explore rural out-migration, but it can be used to observe and discuss the influence or power that opinions like teachers, local politicians, or well-known members of the community might hold in discussions that respond to my research questions. Dialogue opens spaces to challenge and encourages different approaches or opinions. Dewey (1960; 1916) observed that the learning process was a primary focus for youth within a democratic society. Understanding dynamics within communities is only the beginning of a lifelong process (Erickson, 2004). While Erickson (2004) speaks of recognizing power and oppression, rural youth may not use these exact terms. However, dialogue may spark realizations or an ability to name how rural youth and adults may be complicit in structures that exist within rural communities, and how they are impacted by these systems.

Engagement and reflection are key tenants of dialogue, and may lead to action and further reflection. An essential part of the dialogue process builds on adult learning pedagogy. As I expressed in the previous section, dialogue is a process, attentive to context, with the goal of learning and understanding. The process of dialogue is consistent with an adult learning process that includes a planning, action, and reflection, followed by further action and reflection. My theoretical framework highlights the need for an education that creates spaces for an analysis of power and concepts of authority. A nonformal educational approach, built on adult education principles, recognizes that the wisdom of scholars and farmers is equally valid. It provides a strong rationale for including community members in the dialogue process (Spencer, 2006; Mündel, 2002). Applying an intergenerational approach to understanding rural youth out-migration provides a platform on which to base

discussions with rural youth and adults and as Schugurensky (2006) asserts, question notions of education for civic engagement and social justice.

An adult education model guides my research and frames the dialogue process. Adult education, as Spencer (2006) argues, is associated with "social change, social action, social movements, community development, and participatory democracy" (p.53). Through dialogue rural community members may experience shifts in thinking or changes in perspective, new ways of communicating, and individual and collective changes of thoughts and courses of action. In other words, adult education is social in its process and in its purpose. The dialogue process in one rural community provides evidence that this model has potential for communicating between rural community members and across generations. It demonstrates how dialogue contributes through a social process with a broader purpose. Welton (2003) emphasizes that adult learning is individual and collective. I draw on the following principles of nonformal education and adult learning as I develop a framework for dialogue with youth and adults. This adult learning involves five key components. It is non-formal and experiential, the cognitive, attitudinal and value (affective) dimensions of community members are often deeply influenced as interaction and learning happens in a real life context; 2) community-based, community members are challenged to learn within the complex dynamics of selected geographical communities; 3) collective as well as individual: community members are frequently challenged to process, analyze and reflect on their learning collectively; 4) critical: the learner is challenged to question and analyze the sources and bias of information received and given; and it is 5) evaluative: the community member is assisted in assessing and monitoring her/his own learning and responses to local issues (Mündel, 2002, p.20). A critical aspect of research involving rural youth and adults is grounding the research in an understanding of local lived experiences and the power of local knowledge, while situating the research in a broader social context. Lather (1992) offers an approach for understanding "ways of knowing" and probing the perspectives from which youth "view their [realities] and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority" (p.93). In the next section, I turn to how local

knowledge, lived experiences, and how ways of knowing contribute to conscientization.

Conscientization

Conscientization can best be described by anchoring it in critical pedagogy, or as Wink (2000) explains, thinking and re-thinking our lived experiences compared with others, and then moving from a passive stance to an understanding that we "know what we know", that we have a voice, and then mustering the courage to question ourselves and our roles in society (p. 36-37). In other words, "[c]ritical pedagogy asks how and why knowledge gets constructed the way it does, and how and why some constructions of reality are legitimated and celebrated by the dominant culture while others are clearly not" (McLaren, 1989, p.169). A critical lens is important when we view how knowledge is constructed. It is important to reflect on actions with a critical awareness of how they might impact the present and future.

Conscientization describes critical awareness and an understanding that learners have of themselves as agents with the capacity to build a democratic society. In a rural context, it is important to recognize that this awareness and sense of agency is situated in a social and historical context. Conscientization has roots in education theory that challenges the dominant discourse (Freire, 1970) and Marxist social theory that emphasized that those with power in a society have an interest in reproducing dominant values (Marx,1977; 1867). Conscientization stems from popular education foundations and practice which emphasize that individuals' experiences of the world are interconnected with issues, and responses to these issues, at an educational, political, and societal level (Freire, 1970). Conscientization is rooted in local or indigenous knowledge, and as Sousa (2006) stresses, it involves an in-depth knowledge of local issues leading to united action, or integrating new knowledge into existing social practice (p.269). In other words, conscientization implies both an awareness of the connection between the individual and society, as well as the next step towards action.

An individualistic approach to education and community development is challenged through conscientization that shifts the focus to collaboration and

connection. Individual players are linked as cultural and political actors with a direct connection to what is happening socially and economically in their society. In my study, rural community members are participants at the heart of discussions about the social and political dimensions of their communities. This participation aids understanding of how local assumptions and priorities might impact opportunities to stay in the community. A dialogue process contributes to learners' agency to contribute to social change (Hinchey, 2004, Fielding, 2001) and the important elements of questioning and communication through dialogic inquiry (Wells, 1999). Dialogue is a practical approach that links theory with action, and enables a diverse group of participants to build trust to talk deeply and personally about some of the issues and realities that divide them. Dialogue is often deliberative, involving the weighing of various options and the consideration of different viewpoints for the purpose of reaching agreement on action steps or policy decisions (Heirerbacher, 2011, National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation). The dialogue process advances learning and raises consciousness about our potential to contribute to change. Next I describe the elements of dialogue and the process that creates an environment for this learning to occur.

By organizing dialogue in small groups, participants learn through sharing experiences. The focus is on learning. Dialogue is not about "solving" the problem, but understanding the problem and context from different points of view, building trust to work together in the future. In other words, dialogue may "dispel stereotypes, build trust, and enable people to be open to perspectives that are very different from their own" (Heirerbacher, 2011). Dialogue can, and often does, lead to both personal and collaborative action.

Dialogue creates a foundation for deliberation. Rather than making decisions based on power or coercion, dialogue emphasizes a decision-making process that involves all participants and explores options. Inclusion is very important to the process. A variety of perspectives, backgrounds, and levels of influence enrich the discussion and validate the outcomes (Heirerbacher, 2011, and National Centre for Dialogue and Deliberation). The purpose of using dialogue in my research is to build trust, mutual understanding and relationships. From this base rural participants can

communicate and deliberate about the factors that impact rural community life, and their views on youth migration. By participating in dialogue in a rural setting my aim was primarily to develop deeper understandings of my research questions and develop a framework for dialogue between generations. Understanding an issue through dialogue requires focus and facilitation. My intention was to focus on the process itself and how it contributes to learning. However, it is important to recognize that it has the potential to set a foundation for future action.

In this way, dialogue and subsequent deliberation can serve a variety of purposes, including but not limited to six key areas: 1) resolving conflicts and bridging divides; 2) building understanding and knowledge about complex issues; 3) generating innovative solutions to problems; 4) inspiring collective or individual action; 5) reaching agreement on or recommendations about policy decisions and finally; 6) building civic capacity, or the ability for communities to solve their own public problems. My focus is on building understanding and knowledge about rural communities from the perspectives of youth and adults. Dialogue is a process that involves key steps and preparation: 1) background preparation work; 2) introductions; 3) establishing guidelines for participation; 4) sharing personal stories and perspectives; 5) exploring a range of views; and this approach may lead to 6) deeper analysis and reasoned argument; and 7) deciding on action steps or recommendations. I apply a process of dialogue in Kitscoty, and describe how this experience informed how I develop my framework for intergenerational dialogue, in Chapter 7.

In dialogue, an opportunity for engagement is the key. The researcher or facilitator must be aware of their own power. Fairfield (2010) offers insight and an important critique of Freire's (1973) concept of dialogue that stresses reflecting on one's own world with the potential to transform it. Freire's stance may be problematic because the educator (or researcher and facilitator in the case of this study) has the power and critical consciousness in this setting (Fairfield, 2010), while true dialogue "represents a continuous, developmental communicative interchange" through which we might understand the world, ourselves and one another (Burbules, 1993). While Freire's notion of dialogue has the potential and goal of raising critical

consciousness, the purpose of this study is to set up a dialogue with the primary goal of understanding the rural communities and the lives of youth and adults through reciprocal exchange and communication. There is the possibility of higher level learning, critical reflection, and conscientization, but the process and opportunity for engagement is the key. Dialogue may have an intended goal, or may be more process-oriented with a focus on communication to engage participants in a process without a certain outcome (Burbules, 1993). The process of dialogue is based on trust which sets the stage for future dialogue and deliberation.

Dialogue is central to education, and education is a key component of dialogue. Freire (1970; 1973) focused on the element of communication in dialogue with his emphatic statement that "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education." This theoretical understanding is an important concept for others who are interested in this framework and a dialogue approach in their own rural communities. However, with dialogue comes an increased sense of responsibility. It is necessary to problematize the process and potential limits, risks, and possibilities. However, despite the challenges, there is potential for transformation in the dialogue process, that is a "fundamental activity of democracy," (Houston, 2004) and it is a process through which to build trust to explore the challenges and potential barriers to rural civic engagement.

Creating spaces for true dialogue to unfold means recognizing that there are structural inequalities in power imbalances at the very root of educational systems and organizations, and rural communities are not immune to these injustices. Cultural, gender, race and class dimensions exist even within the most homogenous communities. Dialogue opens a space for these experiences to be shared *with* and *between* community members rather than research that is *about* rural communities. On a deeper level I considered how I might respond as a researcher if participants were reluctant to talk about some of the structures (formal and unspoken dynamics, such as the power that dominant families or community groups families can have within a rural community) that exist in their rural community, or if participants were resistant to listening to others or challenging inequalities, as highlighted by Boler (2004). When approaching this dilemma, I focused on taking the time to listen to

individuals and small groups during the coffee breaks and after the dialogue as well as in the more formal dialogue process. I drew on the theoretical components of inclusion and democratic learning from a collection of scholars committed to unveiling the challenges and potential of dialogue (See for example Boler, 2004; Berlak, 2004; Glass, 2004; Houston, 2004; Jones, 2004, Li Li, 2004; Vella, 2004).

Dialogue encourages participation and agency in the learning process. Dialogue is built on a process of engaging in discussion with the educator, while grappling with the content, thus increasing the focus on horizontal power relations (Avoseh, 2005). But do these reconstructions of power relations really exist? Dialogue encourages participation in a learning process that is consistent with adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980; Vella, 2004, 2002) and contributes to learning as a practice of freedom with dialogue and 'problem posing' as a key component to the process (Freire, 1970/1994). Thus, dialogue is an important theoretical construct in rural communities because it has the potential to create a less divided and more just society (Jones, 2004), and there is an opportunity for previously marginalized members of society to be part of renegotiating, and rewriting meaning (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991). However, progressive scholars continue to question whether or not social inequalities are addressed and unpacked or perpetuated by discussion or dialogue that may accentuate these inequalities (Glass, 2004; Houston, 2004; and Li Li, 2004). As Jones (2004) explains:

> Thus democratic dialogue is far more than an opportunity for the exchange of ideas, or gathering interesting information about other people's lives. It is an explicitly political event because it attempts to shift the usual flow of power in order to un-marginalize the marginalized. Voices that are usually marginalized – which is to say silenced – are to be centered and therefore empowered (p.59).

This theoretical grounding on the process of dialogue exposes the limits, risks, and possibilities of dialogue. This research process builds on the theory of dialogue to center and empower the voices of the youth, but the question remains, *what next*? This theory highlights the limits and risks of dialogue, as well as the essential nature of this educational method helps to ground my research design.

Engagement and communication are two key elements of dialogue that provides an opportunity to 1) contextualize issues, 2) identify common ground, and

3) explain the short- and long-term costs and benefits of decisions (Bruning, Dials, and Shirka, 2008). Moreover Bruning et al (2008) describe a dialogic approach that creates the conditions for community members to ask questions, express viewpoints, and better understand the issues or proposed solutions. Ultimately, engaging in this type of interaction increases understanding of the issues and between community members. There are important aspects to consider. Once dialogue has taken place and participants have discussed the needs and opinions, "what happens next?" While it is critical for practitioners to design initiatives that respond to the expectations expressed in the dialogue, my research is concerned with community-based rural education and rural community development. In a rural community dialogue, it is up to the participants to decide "what next" or to determine if and in what ways action is necessary beyond the dialogue.

In my research, the dialogue process is an invitation to discuss the issue of rural youth-outmigration, to learn more about community assets and challenges, and to engage with youth and adults in a reciprocal exchange. The types of communication that can be problematic in rural communities include communication that goes only one-way, or when only dominant voices are heard. There is also risk involved with dialogue. Although it is rooted in ethical, moral ground that stresses reciprocity and equality, Kent and Taylor (2002) warn that the dialogic process can be subverted "through manipulation, disconfirmation, or exclusion, and then the end result will not be dialogic… [D]ialogue is not a process or a series of steps…[r]ather, it is a product of ongoing communication and relationships" that involves tenets of "trust," "risk" and "vulnerability" (p. 24). As I explored in my previous discussion on community development, equity and communication are key elements to building solidarity and agency within the community. Next I elaborate on this process of learning.

I apply the elements of dialogue in a rural place and necessarily illuminate the rural context. It is importance to be attentive to historical and cultural context (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Dialogue has the potential to build a foundation of trust from which to address inequalities and imbalances in power, authority, gender, and social structures, while it frames social issues that are highly relevant to a rural

community in a rural and political context. In this way, while I focus on local rural areas in Alberta, this research has broader relevance.

To respond to the research questions in this study, it is critical to understand how different kinds of life experiences shape our thinking and ways of exploring alternatives (Hinchey, 2004). Starting from the premise that education is a continual process of learning through experience, and then reorganizing, restructuring and transforming (Dewey, 1980); dialogic learning emphasizes the validity of drawing evidence from our interactions and conversations. A dialectic is the "tension" of "thoughts, ideas, values and beliefs," (Wink, 2000), while dialogue is conversation, "profound, wise and insightful…that changes us or our context" (p.47). It embodies what Freire refers to as being "patiently impatient" (Wink, p. 47). Dialogue involves a process of learning that is based on understanding a diversity of experiences, but rooted in equality, with arguments stemming from validity claims and examples or evidence, rather than positions of power. Thus arguments are communicated and expressed to advance learning rather than to assert a position of authority. For instance, in a rural community dialogue, examples from community members' lived experiences in their rural context will add credibility to their claims. I now elaborate on linking the theoretical concepts of dialogue with the process of dialogue for learning from the rural community members and engaging youth and adults.

Intergenerational Dialogue – Engaging Youth and Adults in Learning

An intergenerational dialogue approach between youth and adults creates spaces to examine not only who has the power to affect change (Freire, 1970) but how this is understood in a contemporary rural community context in Alberta. The literature emphasizes the awareness that our stories are told through our collective history in which we are active agents (van Manen, 1977; Freire, 1970). Our connection to a rural place and the people we know amplifies our connections and rootedness in these places, and impacts our sense of rural identity and responsibility (Berry, 1990). This sense of community identity and commitment may impact our understanding of our own capacity to impact change, and provide the necessary fuel or desire to act and organize to benefit the rural community.

The key to rural community organizing lies in what scholars such as McLaren and Leonard (1993) assert as "knowing that society and history can be made and remade by human action and by organized groups; knowing who exercises dominant power in society for what ends, and how power is currently organized and used in society" and the ability to translate an understanding of social structures to one's own context (p.32-33). In a rural community faced with mass out-migration and problems such as youth unemployment, questions of 'who' has the power to affect change, 'how,' and 'why,' are vital because they begin to examine how community members might participate to impact their own communities. In this study I use dialogue to build capacity and engage youth and adults in conversation to understand their sense of community and the issue of out-migration. By building partnerships between youth and adults a dialogue framework may enable generations to work together to understand their collective power to theorize and act.

Intergenerational dialogue is purposeful and can lead to new awareness or consciousness (Burton and Point, 2006). Adults and elders (these may include Aboriginal Elders and non-native community leaders) have a unique depth of 'lived experience' to share with the younger generation. Burton and Point (2006) emphasize the role of non-formal, experiential mentoring and storytelling, and "grassroots activism… result[ing] in community development programs, such as leadership training and consciousness-raising" in the histories of Aboriginal adult education in Canada (p. 44). Intergenerational wisdoms are demonstrated further in the major role that adult leaders like the Raging Grannies have played in shaping creative, non-formal education and our political history in Canada (Roy, 2004). I extend these ideas by proposing that the younger generation has a new context and set of experiences to share and compare with the adult generation.

The long-term value of an intergenerational dialogue framework to communicate at the community level addresses the role articulated in the literature for the inclusive, equitable, transformative, and sustainable nature of adult education. In addition, it has the capacity to mobilize rural community members to organize on their own with direct applications for the design of rural community development policy to address a holistic vision of rural health that includes learning and

employment opportunities for rural youth. As stated by authors Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette (2000) employment and education are often cited as reasons that young people leave rural areas, and rural youth are asking for mentorship opportunities, thus an adult education approach that includes mentorship and dialogue to address this barrier is highly relevant in a rural context (Canadian Rural Partnership 2002; 2004; Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000).

It is possible for people to have more control over their lives through community participation, learner involvement, and empowerment (Chovanec, 2006, Foss, 2006). Discourse around education which emphasizes storytelling, popular education techniques and collective biographies to examine learners and workers roles to analyze power relations also supports an adult education approach to consciousness-raising and action at a community level (Fenwick, 2006, p.195). Scholars' emphasis on challenging assumptions and recognizing the role of adult education to "support individual, social, and political actions to improve individual and community capacity to act on various social and economic [and environmental] determinants of health," (Nutbeam, 2000) provides a theoretical foundation to support an intergenerational network to build a holistic understanding of community, but there are limits and possibilities to exploring different "patterns of meaning" involved in the process of learning which invite new possibilities for understanding (Butterwick and Dawson, 2006, p.282). As these scholars emphasize, when examining solutions, the questions remain: solutions are 'alternatives' to what? Why do these structures exist in the first place? Who is included in leadership and decision-making, and who benefits? These questions will guide a reflective process in my research.

Previously I outlined conceptions of community to illuminate the need to understand agency, engagement and participation as key elements in just and sustainable community development. It is important to consider both people and place as Theobald and Nachtigal, (1995) emphasizes, to understand the larger social, economic, and cultural context of community. Through analyzing community participation, aspects of "healthy communities" including social, economic, environmental and cultural factors, can be identified through various models and

lenses (Swift, Davies, et al., 2003). Further, adult educators like Hicks (1988), Reardon (1995, 1998), Toh and Cawagas (2000), and Ahearn (1994), emphasize that adult education contributes to community development, an idea reaffirmed by Goldstein and Selby (2000), and prominently articulated by Freire (1993). I determine that engaging in community dialogue is the best method for learning about people and the place, and the interconnectedness between community members and their context. Thus, dialogue and engagement (Bruning, Dials, and Shirka, 2008; Kent and Taylor, 2002) are critical to work with local communities to analyze issues like rural migration.

The concept of agency in community development that was discussed previously underscores the importance of recognizing that learners are capable of creating new knowledge, as partners and "individuals who can proceed from the known to the unknown" and emphasize that knowledge belongs to and empowers both the learner and the educator (Avoseh, 2005, p.3). I extend this idea to include the potential for new theory, grounded in experiences, which is also developed through synthesizing, analyzing, and contextualizing our own lived experience and applying it to a larger context. Thus, rural community members have some autonomy over their learning and their experiences in their rural setting. Further, rural community members, have power based on their own understanding and experience that they are bringing to dialogue. Where there is a lack of community cohesion or despair in a rural community, there may also be solidarity, forms of resistance that strengthen community cohesion, and possibility for alternatives. Power needs to be unpacked, however, to understand that it includes both risk and possibility, and to understand more explicitly why some community members have power and ideas that are recognized - in essence, a voice - while others pale or are barely audible in comparison.

The purpose for exploring an intergenerational framework is to develop a theoretical and practical approach to engaging with youth and adults that contributes to the existing body of literature, knowledge, and practical skills. This framework is a tool for dialogue to investigate how intergenerational wisdom, experience and insight are integral to effective policy and programs in rural and remote Canada.

How do we know that such a framework is useful or necessary? Participation and adult learning is connected to "…community development, and participatory democracy" (Spencer, 2006, p.53). Implicit in an intergenerational dialogue framework is the engagement required for citizens in a rural community to be actively engaged in their community.

Up to this point I have I discussed the theoretical foundations and lenses through which I will synthesize and evaluate the existing scholarship, analyze my research questions, and situate my contribution to theory and practice. Four key theories are the pillars of this research: 1) community development theory, specifically 2) sense of community theory, 3) social capital, and 4) youth engagement. These theories inform my exploration of power and agency, and serve as a basis for a deeper understanding of the adult learning processes of dialogue, conscientization, and engagement. By setting up this theoretical foundation, and examining the elements, I can explore how major issues are debated and presented in rural communities, and discern how my own theory and framework will advance this body of knowledge.

A foundation of solidarity and agency is central to the theories I have selected for my work. There is a strong connection between theory and practice with attention to application in a rural community or evolving community contexts. These theories stress the social fabric of rural community life, as well as economics, with a focus on participation, engagement, and collective decision making to strengthen resilience and counter the erosion of communities. These theories support a democratic process of strengthening rural community resiliency through practical elements such as leadership, mentorship, participation, and engagement. A focus on reciprocity and inclusion sets the context for knowledge to be shared and all generations to be at the heart of the community decision making. These theoretical foundations do not assume an absence of conflict, but rather emphasize the power of agency to organize and suggest collective responses to local concerns, which sets the stage for dialogue to occur.

The theoretical foundation and its elements provide a basis from which I can explore other related themes within this scholarship such as literature on global, political, and economic contexts and rural sustainability. These are critical theoretical perspectives that are crucial to my research questions relating to the issue of rural youth migration and mobility, and communication between generations. They will further support the discussion of how the research findings from this study may inform future rural education and rural development policy.

In the next sections I develop my conceptual framework which includes seven elements. I explore and conceptualize the foundational ideas that I have presented so far, and expand on education and community capacity building highlighting two key areas of research: community development and potential for youth engagement. Ultimately the theories that underpin my research provide a foundation for understanding the concepts and central issues of rural out-migration, education, and rural community development.

Conceptual Foundations of Research in Rural Settings

In the final section of this chapter, I extend the theoretical concepts I developed to build the conceptual foundation that will inform my research design and subsequent analysis. I stress the value of an inter-sectoral approach, including mentorship between youth and adults, to strengthen civic engagement and opportunities for learning in rural communities. From my theoretical foundations that include dialogic learning theory, youth engagement, and my understanding of adult-youth partnerships, I build a research design and conceptual framework. The proposed lens draws from relevant theories and adapts aspects from community-based development and youth engagement. In the next sections I elaborate on these elements, and how they relate to engaging youth and adults in dialogue. Because dialogue offers a means to connect with community members to explore rural identity and local issues such as outmigration within the rural context, this conceptual lens has dialogue at the center as the key element

Developing a Conceptual Understanding

The conceptual lens that I develop here is comprised of seven key elements, each of which are crucial to enhance rural community development: 1) A Sense of Community; 2) Social Capital; 3) Engagement; 4) Dialogue; and 5) Power and Privilege; 6) Conscientization; and 7) Context, to understand rural communities with youth and adults as participants. The first element, sense of community, is operationalized by using an integrated approach to understanding communities, which is central to the sense of community theory. An intergenerational dialogue approach considers these elements as integrated in a rural community: 1) shared interests, 2) a collective sense of a community memory or story, and 3) economic and educational dimensions of the community, and 4) shared emotional connection. Participants in the dialogue may share an emotional connection that includes participating in or identifying with a shared history, as this "shared history becomes the community's story…" and narrative (1986, p.14; Wright, 2004). Shared emotional connection in the rural community dialogues may extend from the past into the future by illuminating "shared history, time together, common places, and similar experiences" (1986, p.9). Shared connection, or what I described in previous chapters as membership (Chavis and McMillan, (1986) is an important concept in understanding why young people might choose to stay or go.

The concepts of belonging and identity are central to examine youth engagement and relationships between youth and adult generations and the assets and elements that strengthen communities (Bartsch, 2008; Bhattachararyya, 2004; Caton and Larsh, 2000; Kline, 1997; Fuller, Guy and Pletsch, 2001, Macklin, 2008). The elements of shared emotional connection, membership, and belonging in McMillan and Chavis' (1986) *sense of community* theory also help us to understand how dialogue may provide a method to talk about the realities of rural community life, and strengthen the connections between generations, potentially countering patterns of rural youth out-migration. How we theorize and discuss rural communities is an important element to how a younger generation conceptualizes these communities, and whether or not they perceive them as important places. In this way membership, identity, and a sense of belonging are important factors.

The second element, *social capital*, describes the networks built on trust and reciprocity that set the tone for engagement and participation. As I have illustrated previously, theories of *social capital* contribute to exploring these connections and sense of cohesion in a community that are part of what may draw youth to stay or return. Ultimately, community - as a construct and as a definition – matters. What we mean by community is important. It helps to build a case for why youth might choose to stay in rural areas. Building from that foundation, what are the possibilities for youth involvement with an older generation to contribute to rural community sustainability? How might youth strengthen their connections to the rural community members, (such as parents, youth leaders, coaches and educators), and to the rural place? While some scholarship focuses on geography; some on a sense of place or connection (Berry, 1990; Wotherspoon, 1998), there are issues beyond the semantics that extend to how "community" is discussed in political discourse. Is it a discourse of despair, of a dying land with closures of essential services as is reflected in some of the literature that I reviewed in the introduction? Is the emphasis on resilience and the importance of rural areas - including assets within rural communities that encompass volunteerism and citizen engagement? By examining concepts of community relations and the power structures that exist within these communities, educators, young people, and farmers alike can explore how learning is constructed and participate in these conversations as stakeholders. We all have something to lose with rural out-migration. What is at stake is preservation of a way of life and a place – both culture and geography - that impacts different groups, both inside and outside Alberta. Environmental stewardship and food production are at risk with outmigration, as are transportation routes and ecological diversity that is essential to human life. At the same time, a rural identity, history, and sense of community that is fostered in a rural community is much harder to quantify, but is important to preserve as a way of life and culture. Although I define "rural" in terms of population and distance from a major centre, what counts as 'rural' can encompass a distinct rural identity that I explore later in the discussion. Kitscoty, in these terms, is rural in a particular sense. However, rural communities in more isolated places, outside Alberta's prosperity, and in Aboriginal communities, or communities with diverse

populations, as described by Looker (2001) are part of a system, and their demise comes at an economic, environmental, and social cost. One example expressed in the literature and affirmed by the results from this study, are the valuable social networks and connections. Putnam (2007) emphasizes the social fabric and the impact that strong social ties have on civic engagement and quality of relationships. These social networks may not be as evident in the pursuit of individualism that often prevails in an urban setting. I turn now to explore these networks in greater depth.

Relationships and social networks are important considerations in youth engagement and migration. Forms of capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) including social and cultural capital, emphasizes the importance of social networks and accumulated capital or wealth. It helps us to understand the social context and the messages that youth receive in a rural community, and aids us in a deeper exploration of the tensions that exist in the lives of rural youth. This theory sets the stage for understanding how and why to explore relationships and social networks, how to connect youth and adults together to communicate about their hopes for their community, and provides a basis for analyzing how strengthening these networks might help to counter rural out-migration.

Understanding youth decisions to stay in rural communities includes exploring the importance of kinship and family connections, potential capital in social and cultural networks, and economic and environmental factors such as local resource base. The decision to leave or stay is complex for many rural youth (Crockett & Bingham, 2000; Jones 1999). As Looker (2001), Broomhall and Johnson (1994) assert, the choice to stay may come at a cost – to the individual and to the communities. For example, it may narrow educational and economic opportunities. As previous research in the field of rural education and rural sociology illustrates, there is a dilemma in the risk of leaving a rural community to pursue education or career paths that are unknown, with no guarantee of success (see for example, Corbett, 2007). Looker (2001) also emphasizes family and social cohesion, and recognizes that not all rural youth have adequate supports or networks, and many may be marginalized. An understanding that not all youth have access to the same social capital is essential, and as Corbett (1007) recognizes, it must include a gender

analysis. The gap in resources and supports for rural youth is an important consideration for educators and policy makers.

Networks and relationships are key elements that may impact youth mobility and engagement. The elements of relationships, trust, and reciprocity in social capital theory, particularly the connections to social networks in rural communities, familial values and expectations, and gender roles, will guide how I develop my interview protocol.   My research aims to address the types of supports that might increase community cohesiveness between generations, increase social capital, and create a new form of communicating about ways to enhance rural community sustainability. Further, I will use social capital to inform my analysis as I examine and analyze the responses. The underlying ideas of social capital contribute to a richer understanding of how youth may be involved in rural communities and how they are impacted by various forms of capital. For example, the ideas of capital can be operationalized or moved into action, exploring forms of capital within the rural community through discussions about assets, relationships, forms of reciprocity, and networks within the community. The dialogue conversations provide insight into why and how youth might feel they have opportunities or have a sense of membership and belonging, and ultimately, why youth might stay. Next I discuss the concept of engagement.

The third element is *engagement*. Youth participation and engagement are central in youth-adult partnerships, and the essential elements of solidarity, trust and reciprocity are at the core. Although there are many models of youth participation and partnership, Fletcher's (2009) *Measure of social change led by and with young people* focuses on relationships built on trust. The elements of engagement that will be applied to my research include relationship building as a spiral that works outward to an ideal where community members are able to participate –to be involved, and included in decisions and actions that strengthen community resiliency. In conversations with rural researchers, it is becoming clearer to me that this participation is not a nod to "equity" and it is not necessary for every community member to be included at all levels. However, a broad-based process that includes rather than excludes community members across generations is a reasonable goal. It was important to consider power differences in a rural community and how factors

like formal education or unspoken positions of power such as family position plays out in this setting (as in many institutions, people know their place). I knew that I could not assume equality, but hope that the process of dialogue can lead to some form of increased participation or understanding. In this sense, dialogue is an invitation to participate in a process that can strengthen community involvement and resilience. The focus on communication and participation aims to include community members, regardless of age, experience, and background. Beginning from the first steps, engagement moves from a point where young people are assigned action and help to inform decision-making; to more inclusive stages where young people are consulted, but adults act; to a place where youth and adults share decisions and action. The spiral is helpful in conceptualizing a dialogue approach in which community members equally participate. In the future this may contribute to a community approach in which youth and adults share decisions and take action. This is the most optimal position for social change by and with young people, as Fletcher (2009) explains:

> … it engages every person within a community in decision-making and action through democracy. Instead of simply seeing community as geography, this approach embraces the roots of the word [com = with] as a group of people working *with unity.* Age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, language, ethnicity, and other qualities are embraced as strengthening identity that contributes to a larger good, not as segregating differences. All members experience inclusive, meaningful, empowering participation that is the pinnacle and goal of action and education for social justice…this is the heart of democratic society.

Democracy and building trusting relationship are a strong basis for my study. This model highlights the importance of engaging every community member in decision-making and action, moving towards common goals. By focusing on youth and adults communicating within a reciprocal, cooperative, and democratic process, my work focuses on inclusive, meaningful participation in a rural community context. Sense of community, power and privilege, social capital and engagement support my choice to include a methodology with youth and adults communicating together. I also explore social, economic, environmental, and cultural factors that impact rural identity, place, and sense of responsibility to rural communities, and how youth and adults communicate about these factors. Sense of community theory, and unpacking

power and privilege, support an approach that is participative with community members, and builds a sense of belonging to the group.

Previously, I pointed to youth participation and engagement in Freechild organization's cycle of youth participation (2008), and Fletcher and Varvus (2006) cycle of youth engagement as central components in social change with youth as co-creators of knowledge. These theoretical and practical models are a foundation for developing youth-adult partnerships in a rural community. I apply these ideas to a framework that includes youth in all levels of decision-making, partnership, and process. A key tenet of this research lies in understanding that long-term, sustainable engagement requires youth to have the resources or tools to be informed, and the ability to engage in theory and practice (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2004). Young people ultimately co-create knowledge and resources in youth-adult partnerships. Analysis of various theoretical frameworks for community development and youth engagement shows a need for a new theoretical framework - one that focuses on co-creating knowledge through intergenerational dialogue, adult education principles, and reciprocal engagement between youth and adults.

Dialogue, the fourth element in my conceptual framework, is enhances the opportunity to strengthen a sense of community and social capital. Dialogue contributes to co-constructing knowledge and developing a *sense of community* through learning between generations, and enhances a sense of rural identity and cohesion. The dialogue process, in concrete terms, involves seven key elements: 1) preparation work; 2) introductions; 3) establishing a framework or guidelines; 4) sharing personal stories and perspectives; 5) exploring a range of views; 6) analysis and reasoned argument; and 7) deciding on action steps or recommendations. In my study I focus on the exploration stage, sharing stories and perspectives, a range of views, and analysis from the participants' points of view. In some cases recommendations or action steps may be offered to address a particular problem or situation that comes out of the dialogue, but the focus is on understanding, building trust and rapport while learning about the community and new insights with a range of perspectives on my research questions.

There are five steps to setting up a dialogue, suggested by the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation: 1) Preparation; first I will get to know the issues and prepare participants for the process; 2) Introductions; to set a tone of respect and rapport; 3) Establish/present guidelines; setting ground rules such as "speak for yourself, not for a group," and "seek to understand rather than persuade."; 4) Sharing personal stories and perspectives to hear from everyone involved in the process; 5) Exploring a range of views; if the group is fairly similar in their viewpoints, the facilitator can offer different points of view to probe the discussion and set the stage to address divergent views on the topic.

The sixth and seventh steps demonstrate the full cycle of the dialogue process: 6) Analysis and reasoned argument; Dialogue is a reciprocal process used to deepen understanding; and 7) Deciding on action steps or recommendations: Participants in the intergenerational dialogue for this study may demonstrate a readiness to engage in these two final steps. These final steps illustrate the power of the dialogue process for understanding issues that are very real to rural communities, and the willingness to build on this understanding to find and initiate solutions. As I have stated, the purpose of the dialogue process is not intended to lead to collaborative action or decision making on a specific local issue. Rather, I am interested in designing and facilitating a process that could be used to educate people about public issues and build understanding among youth and adults. Further action and planning has been demonstrated in the Rural Secretariat Dialogue (2001). The Community Dialogue Toolkit: Supporting Local Solutions to Local Challenges offers key questions and resources for leading a dialogue process. The resources provided by the Canadian Rural Partnership (2001) outline the dialogue process as follows: 1) Focus on community (what is a healthy community?); 2) What is working? (Examples of people working together); 3) Issues (2-3 most important issues facing the community); 4) Causes and Barriers (what keeps your community from moving ahead?); 5) Policy and Practice (possible actions and solutions); 6) Community Action (best ways to engage other community members). My study draws on this example, but I ensure that youth and adults are part of the process. This intergenerational element, highlighting communication across generations, is at the

core of my research. I am interested in learning from and with the participants about my research questions – the potential for dialogue to explore youth engagement and the issue of youth migration.

Power and Privilege are combined as the fifth element in my conceptual framework. Bourdieu's (1986) emphasis on the different forms of capital and Gramsci's (1977) notion of agency help to explain how power impacts participation within a rural community. For example, supports or barriers to participation may be based on family ties, and real or perceived roles in the community (Corbett, 2007). What happens if there are barriers to participation in rural community life, or you do not belong to the groups that have influence within the community? These questions are important because they probe at the issues of inequality and imbalances of power that exist in the community, and have significance to my study - specifically to educators. Understanding the theory of power and privilege is important in the intergenerational dialogues as we talk about the messages (real or perceived) that rural youth receive about staying, leaving, or returning. In other words, whose voices have most influence to them, and within the community? Further, a discussion of power is significant in the context of rural community out-migration research because it influences who is included, underscores various roles within the rural community, determines who has influence, and defines what it means to belong.

Participation is essential to strengthen rural communities. There are multiple applications for learning the skills of participation. They include civic participation, learning through and engaging in community life, and participating in democracy (Schurgurensky and Mündel, 2004). In this thesis I apply this theory to my research design by working directly with rural community members and interviewing young people who formerly lived in rural areas. Many researchers call for education and programming that is highly relevant to the local community because it is "place-based," or based within a local community context or environment (Anzano, 2011; Berry, 2009; Bartsch, 2008; Budge, 2006; Orr, 2004; Guenewald and Smith, 2008; Gruenewald, 2003; Wotherspoon, 1995). What better way to understand place and the local community context than to explore a sense of what it means to be part of a rural community in a conversation between generations of youth and adults? A

connection between generations offers various perspectives and an opportunity to understand membership, belonging, and participation. This focus on a sense of place and belonging is consistent with *sense of community* theory and theory on engagement.

Inclusion is also central to the discussion of power and privilege in rural communities. An intergenerational dialogue approach, rooted in the context of the rural community, provides a context for important conversations about local community experiences. The process of community development is important because it is includes the elements of inclusion and open-ended questions that Hall and Clover (2006) stress as important to explore complex links between community health and larger issues. In this way, community members are intrinsically linked with their environment, youth, and local issues (2006, p. 250-259). The idea of inclusion leads to preliminary questions for dialogue: What factors motivate or hinder active community participation? What messages (real and perceived) do younger generations receive from the older generation, and how do these messages impact participation? How are the different factors or concerns within rural communities connected? My study is consistent with the literature on dialogue and deliberation and the practical elements of dialogue from the Canadian Rural Partnership (2011), and the National Coalition on Deliberation and Dialogue. For example, the learning or the data from the dialogue processes themselves have the potential to influence decisions and public policy. Although the connection from public dialogue and deliberation to a decision may not be explicit, participants can still understand and appreciate this link. In this way there are longer-term impacts of public dialogue and deliberation, such as civic capacity-building in their community. By creating a space and a framework for dialogue, I conceptualize the ideas of *social capital* through connecting young people and adults.

Conscientization is the sixth element in my conceptual framework. As previously discussed, my understanding of dialogue is based on Freire's (1970, 1993) concepts of conscientization, dialogue, and liberation. This research engages in a community-centred reciprocal dialogue in rural communities with youth and adults, linking us as learners and educators through participation with an active

consciousness. Learners are subjects or active participants in the learning process, with important experiences and insights to share. They may also choose to apply knowledge and take critical action. My role is to create opportunities for the dialogic process to deepen an understanding of discourse and existing relationships of power and our roles as agents for change in rural areas.   The *intergenerational dialogue*, then, will be in the form of guided community dialogues involving both youth and adults. Participants will interview each other. They will have opportunities to tell their stories and share community experiences in a reciprocal mentorship process and exchange of ideas.

Mentorship and engagement contribute to learning from shared experiences, connecting with allies, identifying assets, and "bridging the gap" to understand the challenges or concerns of youth and adults in rural communities (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2004; The Ontario Rural Council - TORC, 2007; Freechild, 2009). I elaborate on these ideas and build the framework for intergenerational dialogue in the 7th chapter. An intergenerational model of education will contribute new knowledge and a purposeful approach to rural community organizing. Scholars describe the power of a critically conscious learning community that has the capacity to generate its own solutions, and as Welton (2006) emphasizes, "imagination to master their life situations" (Freire, 1993; Spencer, 2006; Welton, 2006, p.24). The goal of the participatory, reflexive learning community emphasized in the body of literature on adult education is foundational to my research. An intergenerational framework engages participants in conscious learning to communicate about local issues and solutions across generations.

Context is the seventh and final element of my conceptual framework. Adult learning principles support the exploration of ideas from the "lived experience" of community members in their own community or context. These examples of lived experiences can be used to examine factors that contribute to youth out-migration and the potential negative impact of this migration on the health of rural communities. Concrete examples of context include youth unemployment and school and health center closures, and loss of family farms, as well as lack of community-based leadership and control over local natural resources. Exploring the context and the

issues through shared dialogue opens a space to discuss methods to counter this migration that are relevant to the specific context of the rural community. I include both social and environmental/geographical factors in my research questions and in the protocol for my semi-structured interviews because there is a growing need for research that expands and applies knowledge of the interconnected nature of context to include ideas of place and stewardship (Guenewald & Smith, 2008).

Although the literature from the Canadian Rural Partnership (2002, 2004) and other youth studies (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000) speak about education and employment, an intergenerational study to understand rural context, engagement, and factors promoting and limiting participation in rural communities has not been done. These factors include practical links between accesses to resources and training, social structures, economy, environment (natural and human) and rural-out migration.

Minding the Gap

What is missing from the literature is an emphasis on engaging in a process together with youth and adults and working together to co-construct an understanding about rural community life. Previously I highlighted the importance of youth and adult partnerships to enhance participation and engagement, because both generations have knowledge to share about strengthening rural communities. This gap provides evidence of the need for an intergenerational component in which youth and adults interview each other and then participate in a dialogue. The elements of dialogue, engagement, and capacity building are linked.

Dialogue provides a forum to engage and move the discussion into a deeper form of communication about potential supports and barriers within the community. This sets the stage to examine assets and roles within a community, and how members might move towards a common goal – building capacity in the rural community. Youth inclusion is essential to understand the potential for intergenerational connection to strengthen rural communities. My research method builds on the theory of sense of community, dialogue and engagement to examine the ways in which local community members describe their rural identity, how they see their community assets, how they understand the problems, assumptions, and underlying issues that lead to rural youth out-migration. It builds on the theory of

sense of community, capital, power, and engagement to generate local solutions based on rural community assets, strengthening the social and economic supports in local areas. It may ensure that the local youth feel it is a place in which to stay, or to return if they leave to pursue post-secondary education or other experiences.

Research Questions

My research objectives will be accomplished by addressing the following research question: How can an intergenerational dialogue framework enhance our understanding of the social, economic, educational, cultural and geographical (environmental) factors that influence rural youth migration? I have determined that I will best answer my research question by addressing the following sub-questions:

1.   a) What factors impact youth engagement in the community?

     b) In what ways might these factors enhance or inhibit youth engagement?

2.   What are the messages, (real or perceived), that youth receive about staying and participating in the daily economic, social, political and cultural life in their community?

3.   In what ways do youth/community leaders or mentors describe their individual/collective identity or responsibility in relation to this community?

4.   In what ways might social networks between youth/community leaders or mentors impact youth engagement in the rural community, and their decisions to stay, leave, or return?

5.   How are the factors that may influence a younger generation of rural youth staying, leaving, or returning to their community identified by youth and adults/community leaders?

The intent of these questions is to explore the unique community dynamics and relationships in rural communities and how these dynamics impact the identities and choices of rural youth. These questions are designed to develop a deeper understanding of how and in what ways an intergenerational dialogue framework may highlight the intersections of these factors and networks, and explore in greater depth the impact that mentorship and dialogue may have on youth engagement in the rural community, and their decisions to stay, leave, or return.

Summary

In this chapter I explored and conceptualized the theory and provided evidence to that involving youth and adults in community decision-making is one area for hope (Huckle and Sterling 2001). I set the stage for the dialogues and demonstrated that there is limited literature to describe the process or evaluate and reflect on the results of how youth are currently involved in rural community decisions. I will apply these conceptual ideas to an intergenerational dialogue framework in order to understand community-based challenges and opportunities. There are positive benefits of intergenerational dialogue as a resource for youth and adults to explore challenges, strengthen communities, and identify leadership skills to constructively impact their communities. Starting from an intergenerational dialogue approach that informs and structures my research, I examine existing and emerging theories to address the problem of youth out-migration, and to understand factors that may impact youth engagement in rural communities. My work together with rural community youth and adults will contribute to strengthening existing theories or develop new theories and practical strategies to transform this theory into action (Wellington, 2000, p. 37).

There are seven elements to my conceptual framework. These elements overlap, but each is connected to rural community development and learning from the lived experiences of community members. Interconnectedness is a key element to understand rural community sustainability (Goldstein and Selby, 2000). The possibilities for connections between youth and adults, and a need for mentorship and engagement is emphasized in previous studies (Freechild, 2009; TORC, 2007), but a framework that provides a forum for an innovative form of reciprocal intergenerational dialogue is new to the field. In this dissertation, I recognize the interconnected nature of rural communities and use these elements to analyze data and develop a framework for intergenerational dialogue. This framework contains generalizable characteristics, that enhance our understanding of how intergenerational connections may impact youth engagement in the community, and the factors that may impact rural youth migration.

My conceptual framework addresses the gap in understanding the complex factors that influence youth mobility. I seek to address and how mobility is expressed and understood by youth and adults in rural communities through a new form of

community dialogue and reciprocal mentorship between them. This theoretical perspective offers insight into factors that serve to keep young people in a rural community, as well as factors that may draw them away, entice them back, or keep them from returning. Corbett (2007) and other scholars (Wotherspoon, 1998; Theobald, 1997) focus on formal education systems as part of the discussion of rural areas and mobility. An intergenerational dialogue method builds on existing theory and related literature. It connects participants across generations to discuss the ways in which youth migration is understood as a logical outcome for youth, to provide local alternatives for youth to stay or return to rural communities and to co-construct a range of strategies to understand and address the problem. The research method, including dialogues between youth and adults, builds on theories of engagement to reveal rural community issues as constructs of self, society, and structure - inherently policy issues.   My research questions provide the foundation for these conversations.

Chapter 4 – Methodological and Epistemological Considerations

The primary goal of this study is to respond to the research questions that relate to how communication between generations may enhance our understanding of the social, economic, educational, cultural, environmental and global factors influencing rural youth migration. A multi method research approach was used to best respond to these questions. This chapter is organized into five sections that explain key components of the methodology and epistemological considerations for this study. In the first section I describe my assumptions as I embarked, and present my personal epistemology and ontology. Next I describe my research methodology, approach to data collection, and sample, and explain how I selected participants. In the third section I discuss data collection and analysis, and explain grounded theory. I conclude by describing how I addressed trustworthiness and other ethical considerations in the research. In the final chapter I acknowledge limitations of the research methodology and design.

Research Design: Methodology, Epistemology and Ontology

My foundational positions impact both my theoretical and practical orientations as a researcher and an educator, as I work with others to explore our "lived experience" in the world.   In this section I explain my methodology, assumptions, and my personal epistemology and ontology. By naming my assumptions and position I put my own bias at the fore, and I can analyze my own understanding of knowledge as a construction of language, multifaceted experiences, and theory that informs practice.

A constructivist perspective guides my research. I want to understand why and how phenomena such as youth out-migration or youth engagement occur, who is involved, how the issues are construed, and how they are impacted by the context in which they occur (Palys, 2003). Although my research design incorporates both qualitative (semi-structured interviews and dialogues) and quantitative data (in the form of a survey that also includes open-ended responses), I emphasize the role of human perception in exploring the issues together with participants. I take an interpretive approach to understanding actions in context and use a form of grounded

theory to interpret and construct new knowledge together with participants. In this way, my research is guided by a belief that "knowledge" is in part a social construction that must be situated in a broader social analysis (Palys, 2003, p. 400). In Chapter 7, I discuss how the constructivist-interpretive position is applied to develop the dialogue framework.

My rural background fuels my interest in understanding youth mobility and migration. I have an interest in ways that youth and adults might communicate together to strengthen rural communities. The values that guide this research include my own experience growing up in a rural community which shapes my sense of identity and connection to a rural place. This background has also had an impact on the employment, training, and personal and professional development that I have pursued in both rural and urban settings, particularly my commitment to working with youth. My value for intergenerational knowledge-sharing and seeking a collective response to community-based issues and solutions is also reflected in the research questions. I feel that this informs my data analysis and strengthens my credibility and validity as a researcher.

My position as an emerging scholar with roots in a rural community solidifies my commitment to add knowledge that explains and aims to explore alternatives to out-migration from rural communities. This position also contributes to my interest in educational practices and policies that are relevant to the rural community and support a range of options for rural young people. My reasons for choosing the research topic, the questions, and sample are in response to important questions and an interest in understanding the complexity of reasons that young people choose to stay in rural communities, and if they leave, to explore possibilities for their potential return to rural communities. Beyond the patterns of migration and mobility, my research examines the supports and barriers for youth in rural communities, and how youth and adults can communicate together to understand these patterns. My intention as a researcher is to provide the best method for understanding and analyzing the data, the broader context, and implications of this research.

Through theory and practice, I can begin to "problematize practice and interrogate the status quo..." seeing rural communities through "a new textured light that the lens of theory offers" (Grace, 2006, p. 129). I believe that this application of theory to "problematize practice" is important because theory offers multiple lenses and ways of exploring at times contrasting layers: the interplay of ideas, images, life stories, and language that define and help us construct a specific theory, way of understanding knowledge, or worldview. This position is relevant to my research in rural communities as it accounts for the complex interplay of history, context, and multi-dimensional narratives in a particular place, and underlines my belief that realities are interpreted and socially constructed.

My epistemological and ontological interpretive framework is based on beliefs that guide my research design and action (Guba, 1990, p.17). My research framework is interpretive, which is framed by "beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied" and is reflected in the questions that I ask and the interpretations I bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). My research design reflects a relativist ontology, based on a belief in multiple, constructed realities, and an interpretive epistemology that assumes that the "knower and known interact and shape one another" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

My research framework recognizes the importance of the subjective experiences of individuals in the creation of the social world, and understanding the ways in which the individual creates, modifies, and interprets the world (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). As a researcher and educator, my epistemological position is interpretive (Wellington, 2000). I believe that knowledge is understood from the perspective of individuals involved, and thus, I build on engagement and dialogue to explore my questions with participants and meet my research objectives. This impacts my methodological approach to data collection because I am interviewing and facilitating dialogue as well as observing participants, rather than solely an objective observer. I position my methodological orientation as ideographical, honouring experience, rather than a nomothetic position that is specifically named. This scheme informs my methodology and how I hope to "investigate and obtain knowledge of the social world" (Burell and Morgan, 1979, p.2). In this thesis, my

position influences my commitment to working together with the research participants to explore the issues, possible theories, and the best possible range of responses based on their local knowledge and experiences. Further, my foundational assumptions and position are significant to my beliefs about how individuals "create, modify, and interpret" the world (p. 3), and how I as a researcher will explore and disseminate the results of the research and implications for policy and social change.

Data Collection Methods in Moving Towards Community Selection

For my thesis, I devised an approach based on adult education and community development principles of community participation, learning from lived experiences, and reflecting on these experiences and actions. My methodology builds on the potential for interconnectedness of youth and adults through engagement. It is informed by literature that emphasizes the value of engagement (Dagnino, 2009) and considers that there are more than economic factors underlining why young people leave or stay in rural communities, (Dupuy, Mayer, & Morissette, 2000). I aim to discover with participants what can be learned about these other factors (social, cultural, kinship ties), such as a sense of community, rural identity, or belonging that might impact the future of rural places.

In this study I take a multi-method data collection approach. This includes a survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups in the form of dialogues with youth and adults, (referred to simply as "dialogues"). Further, I employed participant observation and document analysis to explore different facets of the research question, and to address the question through a number of different perspectives (Seale, 2005, p. 294). The rationale for the multi-method data collection was to learn more about participants' sense of their own identity in their communities through their stories and the manner in which they present their lived experiences (van Manen, 1990, 1977; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), while recognizing that the historical and political context matters, and that there are multiple ways of telling these stories and interpreting these lived experiences. This research has the potential to be emancipatory, (Palys, 2003), but the objective was primarily to learn with the participants and apply this understanding to adult education and policy by sharing the

findings with the community members, educators and stakeholders. However, research is not neutral, and a foundational belief that guides my work is that the participants have the capacity to support, improve and contribute to sustaining their own rural communities. My objective in this study is to understand more about rural communities from their breadth and depth of experience and apply this knowledge to answering my research question.

This research involved a sample of current and former members of rural communities, and included youth and an older generation of community leaders and mentors. As I outline in the following sections, my methods included a survey, semi-structured interviews, and two focus groups in the form of community dialogues. Participant observation complimented the interviews and focus groups by providing an additional lens through which to gain insight. Policy analysis is also included in my research design to strengthen the depth of understanding of the issue and context, as well as the current and possible responses. In the next section I describe the methods and participant selection.

For this study, I used a unique and systematic approach to data collection and community selection. First, I reviewed the literature on rural youth migration and mobility and federal and provincial policy documents on youth migration and rural community development. This initial research provided evidence for the need to collect data from those who had left the rural community, both youth and adults within a rural community, and key stakeholders who work with youth or rural community development. I then chose methods that were consistent with a community-based approach to research and used both qualitative methods and a survey to collect my data. The qualitative approach included open-ended questions on my survey of rural youth who had left the rural community, semi-structured interviews, and an intergenerational dialogue with youth and adults. I interviewed participants in three key categories: survey respondents, key stakeholders who work with youth in rural communities, and dialogue participants. These respondents were identified through the survey, or through 'snowballing' of networks through referrals among people who share the same characteristics (Seale, 2005, p. 177). I included interviews with survey respondents to deepen my understanding of the experiences of

youth who had left a rural community for education and who may consider returning to a rural community.

My choice to interview key stakeholders who worked with youth was to understand some of the programming and perspectives of those who work with rural community members. Their experiences can inform education and policy development. Interviews with dialogue participants provided an opportunity to ask them about the experience of the dialogue and more specifically about their own experiences without other participants impacting their responses. I conducted three different types of interviews, including interviews with survey participants who agreed to an interview and provided their contact information; interviews with key stakeholders such as youth leaders, policy makers, guidance counselors and parents; and interviews with the dialogue participants. A focus on rural Alberta increased my opportunities for face-face interactions with community members, and enhanced the depth of the data collected. Selecting the rural community in which to complete the dialogue between youth and adults in the form of a focus group was an important step, which I focus on later. In the next sections I describe the methods, community selection and participants.

Document Analysis

The first step of my research process was document analysis. I examined policy and provincial case study data as a critical step to understanding the cultural, political, economic, educational and social context that frames the experiences in rural communities. The policy documents were selected from Alberta Government documents and strategies, and accessed through the Rural Secretariat, the University of Alberta government library, and the Government of Alberta website. I reviewed the Alberta government documents on rural community initiatives to examine the current discourse. In addition, I reviewed case studies selected for their relevance to the issue of rural out-migration and the literature on rural community development as a basis for analysis I used Alberta policy documents (A place to grow, 2005).

On-line Survey

Next, I developed and conducted an on-line survey and distributed it to students from the University of Alberta, Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta, and other post-secondary sites such as NAIT, SAIT, MacEwan University, Lakeland College, Olds College, Red Deer College, and others that include a sample of students formerly from rural communities. These survey respondents were identified through departments, residences, or key informants, and also self-selected to complete the survey. Participants were chosen based on the criteria that they are formerly from a rural community. The survey was developed in consultation with committee members, and includes questions developed with input from key informants who are familiar with the issues of rural out-migration and mobility. I constructed the survey after completing three pilot interviews, and used the survey responses to inform my interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews. The survey investigated the experiences of those youth who have left a rural community to pursue education. I designed questions that probed their reasons for leaving, including but not limited to education, and factors that may enhance their return to rural communities.

I gained access to the potential survey respondents through requesting permission from the post-secondary institutions, identifying potential respondents through key contacts and presentations about my research topic. I distributed the survey online and let the contacts know that I also could provide paper copies in classrooms with a high proportion of students who may fit the criteria of relocating to an urban center from a rural community for the purpose of education (for example, Rural Sociology, Education, Rural Economy, trades). Potential respondents were informed through a cover letter included with the survey about any limits to confidentiality, use of the data, and to make it clear that participation is voluntary (Rudestam and Newton, 2001). The appropriate number of survey respondents was determined in collaboration with my committee prior to the survey. The survey was designed to gather qualitative as well as quantitative data as probes to understand the respondents' perceptions or views on the issue (Wellington, 2000). The respondents had an option to agree to an in-depth interview after they have completed the survey.

The survey included an option to indicate interest in participating in future interviews as youth who have left a rural community but may choose to return. This connection to those who have left is critical to the research questions. Nearly 200 respondents answered my survey. Of these respondents, several were outside the age criteria or were living outside Alberta, but their responses added interesting background to my work. For example, someone over 40 years old responded from his perspective working for Statistics Canada, and provided highly relevant data and reports for my work. Although I will not use his data for the results of the survey, his perspective as a key stakeholder is significant to my study. More than 30 respondents included their contact information and agreed to participate in a semi-structured interview. I elaborate on the responses to the survey in the chapter on research findings.

Community Selection

After identifying criteria for community selection in the literature, I examined rural community profiles by consulting statistics (Statistics Canada Community Profiles, 2006), census data, community websites, and community reports. I chose potential communities to review with my committee members in the community selection process. One community was selected in which to facilitate the dialogues. This is the rural community in which I would conduct my intergenerational dialogue and interviews with youth and adults who participated in the dialogue. In addition, I chose other potential rural Alberta communities in which to conduct interviews, with careful attention to the selection criteria, and with the intent to challenge some of my own assumptions about rural community development. I discuss the rural community selection for the dialogue in more detail in a subsequent chapter. My rationale for choosing a specific community rather than regions is to begin with local experiences and focuses on the depth of understanding gained through working with community members and hearing their stories.

Secondary Data

As I mentioned in the previous section, I used statistics (Statistics Canada Community Profiles, 2006), census data and community reports. I chose an Alberta

community of less than 2,000 people for a more in-depth observation and the dialogues (including interviews with the dialogue participants). This community was chosen for criteria reflected in the literature as being beneficial or challenging to rural community sustainability, with a focus on youth migration and mobility. For example, I examined statistical data and community profiles to identify communities with the greatest retention and greatest losses of youth generations over time.

Criteria for Selecting a Rural Community

From the documents analysis, survey responses, initial interviews, and careful attention to secondary data, I decided on criteria for selecting the community in which I would conduct the intergenerational dialogues. With Statistics Canada documents, I examined criteria such as age and gains and losses of rural youth in specific communities over time, as well as variance in gender, region and community, and what subgroups may exist in the rural community such as children of farm families, Aboriginal youth, or Mennonite youth (Tremblay, 2001; Looker, 2001). These criteria include:

1) age and gains and losses of rural youth in specific communities over time

2) variance in gender, region and community

3) diversity and subgroups that exist in the rural community such as children of farm families, visible minorities Aboriginal youth, or Mennonite youth (for example, Hutterite or White Russian youth in Tofield or Lac La Biche) (Tremblay, 2001; Looker, 2001)

4) distance from an urban center, community infrastructure, supports and transportation

5) specific rural development initiatives that may provide benefits or create barriers for rural youth, and the current contexts or conditions that may influence these factors

6) rapid economic growth that comes with resource extraction developments (such as oil and mining initiatives) has or has not produced the anticipated benefits of providing jobs for local youth and influenced their decisions to stay or leave their rural communities.

7) evidence of resilience to youth out migration, communities that have been identified by rural community leaders as healthy rural places, such as those that 1) are open to collaboration, cooperation, and forming partnerships; 2) are committed to inclusion and training; 3) recognize the efforts of volunteers; and 4) recognize and use their assets (Rural Canadian Partnership, 2004).

8) evidence of community pride or partnerships between youth and adults, and adults as youth allies

9) communities that may have overcome social challenges or barriers

In addition to these considerations and the data from the survey responses, it was vital to examine the distance from an urban center, community infrastructure, supports and transportation. As Looker (2001) describes, it is important to consider how specific rural development initiatives provide benefits or create barriers for rural youth, and the current contexts or conditions that may influence these factors.

The highly relevant criteria specific to the Alberta context includes evidence of ways that the rapid economic growth that comes with resource extraction developments (such as oil and mining initiatives) has or has not produced the anticipated benefits of providing jobs for local youth and influenced their decisions to stay or leave their rural communities. Additional criteria for identifying communities that may be more resilient to youth out migration, and have been identified by rural community leaders as healthy rural places are those that 1) are open to collaboration, cooperation, and forming partnerships; 2) are committed to inclusion and training; 3) recognize the efforts of volunteers; and 4) recognize and use their assets (Rural Canadian Partnership, 2004). With these criteria as a guide, I identified several communities who were involved with Alberta Rural Development Fund partnerships, several with youth resiliency workers, and those which expressed an interest and commitment to adult-youth mentorship. Some of these criteria were anecdotal and identified by key informants, my committee members, and rural community leaders.

Through the process of examining community profiles and census data and choosing relevant criteria, I identified communities that have struggled with dimensions of the oil boom or have experienced social crisis, and communities that have identified successes in community health and youth retention. Based on the outcome of this initial research for community selection, I considered a community that is undergoing rapid changes, and is currently being developed for resource extraction (example, Tofield, Alberta), and a community that has experienced successes or is implementing strategies for youth retention. Kitscoty, Alberta stood out in this selection process as a community that is impacted by oil and gas, and has

demonstrated success in retaining and attracting young people in the community. This choice reflects the current social, cultural, and economic context in Alberta. Choosing to focus on a rural community for the dialogue process allowed me to identify and examine the collective stories, as well as the projects, infrastructures, and initiatives that are considered by youth and an older generation to be assets or challenges (people, resources, social, economic) to a rural community, according to criteria outlined by the Canadian Rural Partnership (2002), Statistics Canada and census data, and theoretical literature on rural community development.

A key community selection consideration was accessibility. I aimed to conduct the research and interview in a rural community that was close enough to my own community of Edmonton, Alberta so that I could visit several times. I wanted to participate in and observe community events that were considered by community members to be relevant to this research. In chapter 6 I will provide more detail on the process of selecting the community and how I was able to gain entry in order to conduct this research.

Participant and Sample Selection

To conduct this research, I worked with local organizations to identify a sample of current and former members of rural communities. I began with a pilot and interviewed 3 young people (1 female and 2 male) formerly from rural communities currently living in an urban setting. From these initial conversations I had a starting point to develop my survey questions in collaboration with my professor. I intended to include a diverse group of male and female respondents, chosen with input from local community organizations. I explicitly asked organizations and networks to help me to achieve a gender, race, and class balance among participants to the degree that it is possible within the small community demographics. In my discussion chapters that follow I will include a more detailed explanation for how and why the participants were chosen, and explain the demographics of the community to account for the diversity in the respondent group. In semi-structured interviews and member checks I focused on listening for and accounting for the distinctions in their responses (Seale, 2005, p.78), and I explicitly ask questions about the demographics in the community. In order to reflect more accurately the rural contexts in which this

research is conducted, I aimed to state my objectives clearly, and encourage diversity in participation. For a profile of the participants please see table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Study Participants

Method	Gender		Age		Total
	Female	Male	Age Range	Total	
Survey	64%	36%			158 responses
			18-24	46	
			25-30	44	
			31-35	23	
			36-40	9	
			41+	9	131
			One was 16		132 gave age
Interviews	10	5			15
			18-24	2 males 3 females	5
			25-30	1 male 2 females	3
			31-35	1 male 2 females	3
			36-40	1 male 1 female	2
			41+	2 females (Key Stakeholders)	2
Information Interview (not recorded)	3	2	18-24 36-40 41+	1 female 1 male 3 females	5
Dialogue 1	8	1	18-24 25-30 31-35 41+	1 2 3 3	9
Dialogue 2	4	1	31-35 41+	2 3	5
Interviews - Dialogue Participants	6	1	18-24 25-30 31-35 41+	1 1 3 2	7

Participants for the semi-structured interviews, survey, and focus groups in the form of community dialogues were selected through 'purposive sampling' where participants were selected because they have a significant connection to the research topic, in this case, they formerly lived in a rural community, and may or may not intend to return to a rural community, or they currently live in a rural community (Seale, 2005, p. 199). The rationale for including students in the survey is that pursuing formal post-secondary education is indicated in the literature as being a key factor in why youth leave rural communities (Dupuy, et al, 2000).

My choice to include both young adults and a generation of community leaders/mentors is to explore the possible connections for learning between generations, and to explore the process of dialogue, which I explained in my previous chapter. This methodological choice to sample youth and adults together underpinned the decision to conduct focus groups in additional to the interviews to test my hypothesis; enhance my understanding of the intergenerational connections, and co-construct knowledge and theory with the participants. I facilitated two dialogues, recording responses, and observing these interactions. My multi-method research design draws on elements of ethnography (Walsh, 2003), as I gathered narrative information from the participants in response to the semi-structured interview questions; as well as a form of grounded theory, known as interpretive analysis, in which case studies and related data are closely examined with the purpose of identifying themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain the outcomes (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2007). The following table outlines my participants.

Although the size of the sample in this study poses some limitations, the results may be transferable to similar groups and communities, but not generalizable to broader populations that do not share these characteristics (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). Although rural out-migration is a global phenomenon, I have chosen to focus on a sample of young people and community adult leaders or mentors from communities in rural Alberta, and a sample of young people and adults from rural areas who are currently living in an urban setting. My rationale for this focus is the depth and richness of the semi-structured interviews, and their relevance to other rural communities with similar community profiles.

Semi-structured Interviews

I interviewed participants in three key categories: survey respondents, key stakeholders who work with youth in rural communities, and dialogue participants. These respondents were identified through the survey or through 'snowballing' or networks through referrals among people who share the same characteristics (Seale, 2005, p. 177). The interview questions and interview protocol were developed through my continual review of the literature and discussions with other researchers and colleagues. See Appendix B for guiding questions for the individual semi-structured interviews.

I chose to highlight social, economic, cultural, and environmental/geographic factors in my research questions and interview guide because they are reflected in the literature as key factors in determining youth mobility (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002; 2004) and community health (Caton and Larsh, 2000). In my research, I include questions about youth identity and messages between generations. I expand on literature that describes youth mobility as filled with tensions, and as having potentially negative long-term impacts on rural communities across provinces. The intent of these semi-structured interviews is to probe the reasons for leaving the rural community, alternatives to leaving, and what factors, if any, would draw them back to their rural community. I also interviewed several young people who have left and then returned to a rural community, to address the factors that may draw people back to rural communities after leaving.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with a selection of youth who responded to the survey and agreed to be contacted for an interview. These participants fit the profile of young people from rural communities who were currently living in an urban setting for education or economic reasons (two variables suggested in the literature for why rural young people leave the community). Speaking with them was crucial to understanding youths' choice to leave, the types of supports or barriers they experienced in a rural community, and the factors that might encourage them to return to a rural community. Some of these youth intended to return to their rural communities, while others were feeling the pushes and pulls of various priorities. These are discussed in greater detail in the analysis. The

interviews were in-person, or over the telephone, and were recorded. In response to the more than 30 respondents who provided their names and contact information, I prepared an email message including all of the contacts, and sent a letter expressing my request for an interview. From those who responded to my email, I randomly selected participants who were available, including a diverse selection of male and female respondents, and as diverse a group as possible. I conducted 17 interviews from March 2010 to July 2010, with the intent of conducting additional interviews as needed after beginning the process of transcription and initial analysis.

Interviews with Key Stakeholders

My second group of interviewees included key stakeholders who work with young people in Kitscoty and other rural Alberta communities. In this category I completed 3 interviews, as well as two information interviews. I selected a key informant who worked as a Youth Resiliency Worker in a rural community and planned programs for youth in surrounding small towns; a director of a rural community Family and Community Support Services; and an Educational Director who works with a Non-governmental Organization in an urban center that organizes rural outreach tours for and with rural youth throughout Alberta. My information interviews were with a 4-H leader and several other educators who work with rural high school students. I also had an opportunity to speak with a recreation coordinator who manages projects and conducts workshops and focus groups with youth and adults in Northern and rural community development, a contact from Statistics Canada who works with rural community statistics and research, a government worker specializing in education, agriculture, and rural communities, and other educators who work with rural youth. The sample of key stakeholders includes men and woman, ranging in age from 24 to senior citizens.

Interviews in other Rural Communities

In addition to the intergenerational dialogue with youth and adults, I conducted interviews with key stakeholders in three other rural communities. These communities are implementing strategies to retain youth or are facing challenges with a declining youth population, or fit the criteria that I developed for community selection. To select them, I identified key stakeholders working with rural initiatives

reviewed statistics about the population of the communities in which they worked, with attention to youth population. Some examples were teachers working in rural communities on projects to engage rural youth, a youth worker who travels to various rural and Northern communities to interview youth and adults about the challenges and opportunities in their community, or a parent, community worker or guidance counselor. Finally, I planned to interview a number of key informants identified through the survey. The majority of these survey respondents were rural youth who are currently living in an urban setting for post-secondary education. Thirty-five respondents indicated that they were willing to be contacted for an interview, and provided their names and contact numbers. From this sample, I conducted interviews. The rationale for these interviews was to ask additional questions about the potential for return to a rural community, and to probe some of the themes from the survey responses.

Participant Observation - Building Relationships and Rapport

An important component of my research process was building rapport and relationships through participant observation in a rural community context and attendance at local community events. This step was critical to the success of the dialogues. I made numerous trips to Kitscoty, including visits to the local schools, grocery stores, coffee shop, and antique store (where I bought numerous Tonka trucks and learned about local history from the owner). I also went to local businesses and restaurants, the rink, ball fields, meetings with the Safe and Caring Community group, lunch with the Youth Resiliency workers, and participation in the local Community Volunteer Sign-up night. I had a booth about my project alongside the local minor hockey league, Kindermusic classes, dance, 4-H, and others. The participant observation allowed for informal information gathering to meet members of the community and to talk with them more about their community experience and my interest in rural community life as well as youth mobility. People that I met through these networks recommended others to me, or became participants in my study. Further, these observations and contacts compliment the initial narrative and interviews, and will add context to the analysis.

Intergenerational Dialogues

This study aims to create a space for the voices of youth - attentive to race, class and gender as is possible within the chosen rural communities - and focus on hearing those voices. Although my research does not explicitly address race alone within the rural community context, it provides a forum to question how power relations enable or inhibit youth engagement more generally, and how they are challenged or accepted. It delves into the question of who is privileged, whose experiences are counted in the narrative of their rural community, and whose voices are heard within a community.

By framing the discussions in the form of intergenerational dialogues, my study is attentive to issues of power and privilege by providing youth and adults an opportunity to hear about the experiences of others, and to begin to identify their own background and privilege (Vella, 2004; Boler, 2004). It may challenge them to listen more attentively to experiences that differ from their own. The methodological choice to include adults and community leaders (who may be youth or adults) and youth very deliberately in a process of learning and creating knowledge is significant because it recognizes in the theoretical groundwork of previous scholars that there is a gap in connecting youth with adults in hearing these community stories.

In addition to the survey, document analysis, semi-structured interviews and participant observation, a fifth approach was to conduct two intergenerational community dialogues. These dialogues created an environment where the interaction between members added depth and insight to the information gathered through the interviews and surveys (Wellington, 2000). Dialogues are relevant to this study with its strong policy and practical orientation, and to theoretical research that seeks to explore social knowledge and discourses (Seale, 2005, p. 195). The intergenerational dialogues in this study provided a 'tool' of research design, to 'refine and clarify the concepts and help evaluate and interpret research findings (Seale, 2005, p. 195).

Reflecting on the construction of the dialogue process is important to answer my research questions because it helps participants to "create the collective wisdom" that is essential for understanding issues with the insight of local people with lived

experiences. Sharing rural history and story-telling are part of building rural identity. Through dialogue, participants can establish common ground and theorize together. The foundation is built to develop sound, achievable decisions and policies. With this in mind, I develop a dialogue framework with attention to each participant's personal stories and perspectives related to the questions or issue at hand. For example, I might ask how the issue of youth migration impacts rural community members or "how has it played out in your life?" rather than simply "what do you think should be done?" The goal is to build trust in the group, and learn about the issue of rural youth out-migration and community development by seeing the issues and patterns that emerge from different perspectives.

My aim is put the concepts of dialogue into a concrete framework to examine research questions collaboratively with participants to co-construct knowledge. I elaborate on this methodology, what I learned about the process of dialogue, and how I developed a framework for intergenerational dialogue in subsequent chapters. An intergenerational dialogue process is best suited to my research design because it is responsive to people and place. It emphasizes the importance that Berry (1990) and Epp (2001) stress as connection to place for meaningful, democratic participation in rural community life, and sets the foundation for creating knowledge together. It also addresses the Rural Secretariat's Action Plan to strengthen rural community capacity, providing leadership for rural youth and fostering partnerships (Annual report to Parliament 2001-2005). The ultimate result of dialogue is deeper understanding and analysis, with the possibility to move theory into practice and contribute to effective actions that strengthen and sustain rural communities. These elements may be used between generations to explore economic, social, cultural, and educational factors specific to rural communities. This approach is especially important to explore my research questions about how engagement between generations, and how these factors and their context might impact migration.

Interviews with Dialogue Participants

My third group of interviewees included the participants from the dialogue process. These are young people who stayed in or returned to a rural community, and a generation of older community leaders/mentors from that same rural community. A

series of guiding questions probed the nature of their community experience and motivations: anticipated future of their community, challenges, and lessons to share through intergenerational learning. For this group, I engaged in a 6-month process of planning and building relationships, which I describe in detail in the following chapter. Members from the selected rural community were invited to participate in a focused group discussion in the form of an intergenerational dialogue in their community. Participation in the intergenerational dialogue was voluntary. I invited youth and adult community leaders or mentors and aimed for 6-8 participants in each intergenerational dialogue (I facilitated two dialogues), a number suggested in the literature as an appropriate number for discussion (Wellington, 2000).

The intergenerational dialogues offered views into what it is like to live, volunteer, study, raise family, and work in the community. They also contributed to the process of evaluation, planning, and change (Seale, 2005, p. 199) that provides critical insight to my research. To create an environment conducive to enriching the data, the way in which the intergenerational dialogues were planned, organized, and facilitated was essential to address possible limitations (Wellington, 2000). With over a decade of experience facilitating groups and moderating discussions, I have the capacity and skills to plan and carry out the dialogue process and methodology (Wellington, 2000). However, as I discuss in the sections above and in a subsequent chapter, there are challenges to organizing from a distance, and in a community in which I did not formerly have contacts and networks. The contacts and networks that I was able to build throughout the preparation stage of my methodology were very valuable. They provided access to a sample group for the intergenerational dialogues, as well as the semi-structured interviews with the dialogue participants and key stakeholders.

The dialogues served as a forum to address the research questions. These research questions were based on the literature review. The dialogue questions and interview protocol questions were based on responses from the survey. The questions for the dialogue included questions about how intergenerational connections in communities may strengthen rural communities and help us to understand youth engagement. Through the dialogues I learned more about the

factors that influence rural youth decisions to stay, leave, or return. The dialogue participants explored social, economic, environmental/geographic, cultural, and educational links within the rural community. At the same time, there are limits and risk in how a dialogue process is facilitated. I learned more about the process of facilitating and observing the dialogue as it unfolds. It was important to recognize what was possible within the framework of this study. The process was shaped by the participants, and my choice to involve youth at the very core of the dialogue was to address the questions of whose voices in the community may be marginalized. The dialogue provided further insight into factors that contribute to young peoples' sense of a rural identity, their social and economic opportunities, their supports, and factors that may encourage them to stay or return to rural communities. The volunteers agreed to participate in the intergenerational dialogue, as well as an in-depth, semi-structured interview.

Profile of Intergenerational Dialogue Participants

The first dialogue included 9 participants, including a member of town governance; a parent of three boys (aged 18 and older) who also coordinates the parent council; a youth resiliency worker who is working with a local group to start a community-run daycare; a retired teacher who coordinates the senior center; a young woman who has recently returned to the Kitscoty area from a large urban center and is starting her own business, a young teacher who chose to teach in Kitscoty; several young women who grew up in Kitscoty, have chosen it as their home, and now have young children and are active in the community through sports and volunteering; and a mother (I had the privilege to meet her young son at their farm) who is active on numerous boards, helps with the family farm, and works in literacy. Although I initially hoped for a broader age range in dialogue participants, the dialogue recruitment in the research process proved challenging. Ultimately I engaged dialogue participants who were willing to share their rich stories and experiences, but it is important to note that their ages are not as diverse as my original plan. However, the final group did represent three generations. The youngest dialogue participant was 24, and the oldest was in her 60s. The younger group age range was from mid-twenties to early 30s (as I discussed in the community profile section, the median age in Kitscoty is 30), while

the adults were late 40s-60+.   In a research process that includes dialogue, it is also possible that only the more extroverted community members will participate, leaving out the quieter voices of more introverted members. The survey, follow-up interviews with survey respondents who volunteered to be interviewed, and follow-up interviews with dialogue participants allowed for broader range of perspectives to be heard.

The second dialogue included many of the same participants, 7 were confirmed to participate, but several who were confirmed had last minute responsibilities with family, farms, or others commitments such as coaching volleyball. One was not able to attend because she was needed to cover a shift at her family's "Farm Store" invited me to visit the local cheese farm before the meeting. I elaborate on the experience of facilitating the intergenerational dialogue in greater detail in the analysis chapter.   I conducted the second dialogue with 5 members, including one participant who was not able to attend the first one. For both of the dialogues we began with a larger group discussion and then the participants interviewed each other and discussed guiding questions in pairs or triads. The purpose of conducting two dialogues was to build on the relationships and rapport developed during the first dialogue; to go away and reflect on the process and questions with the intention of deepening the discussion in the second focused dialogue session. In hindsight, the second dialogue evening was very helpful to clarify and expand on ideas from the first dialogue.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

This thesis builds on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) premise that there is not a single interpretation of truth, but rather multiple constructed realities (p. 295). Thus, their argument that "truth-value" or internal validity should be replaced by the notion of credibility will guide my research (see Seale, 2005), and I will address the naturalistic inquiry terms that involve credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 77). Credibility is built through prolonged observation, triangulation, and exposure of the research report to other researchers to challenge an emerging hypothesis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Seale, 2005, p. 77).

Credibility was addressed through methodological triangulation as described by Denzin (1978), in which qualitative and quantitative approaches are included in the study, and through the survey, semi-structured interviews, observation, and the intergenerational dialogues. To address Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concepts of dependability, and confirmability, I kept an audit trail in the form of a research journal and the documentation of data, methods, and decisions made during the research project and analysis (Seale, 2005, p. 79). I consider this audit in my own reflexivity to examine the method and process and provide a "self-critical account" of the research process.

The measurement validity in the research tools, or the degree to which the questions in the interviews and on the survey successfully indicate concepts, were guided by methods such as face validity and by conducting preliminary information interviews to test the tools. I also asked people with practical and professional knowledge to assess how well the questions indicate the concepts that I explored in the study (Seale, 2005, p. 72).

A key factor in my method and analysis was to ensure that the voices of the respondents were respected and heard. To achieve this goal, I used a multi-method approach and triangulation to enhance and enrich the data and view the data from more than one standpoint. For example, survey participants were invited to volunteer for a semi-structured interview to probe for additional responses to research questions, and check my interpretation and understanding of their responses (Seale, 2005, p.78). Dialogues were scheduled in September and October in order to have time for reflection and interview dialogue participants to deepen my understanding of the research questions. I also provided dialogue members with a synthesis of my interpretation of what was shared in the dialogues. I sent my dialogue chapter to participants for member validation in the final stages of the data analysis, because I wanted to ensure that I captured their responses accurately. This serves two key purposes, first to add credibility to the study, and secondly, to provide richness and depth to the data and greater accuracy in the final analysis.

Throughout my research, I aimed to establish credibility and maximize the opportunities for participants' voices to be heard, both in data gathering and reporting (Seale, 2005, p.78). It is critical to hear and accurately represent these original and unique perspectives, or clarifications that individuals bring to the investigation. The multi-method research design also enhanced and enriched the data by highlighting multiple voices. I have been invited to meet with the Safe and Caring Community group and community members to talk about my research process and findings.

Data Analysis

The interview audiotapes and intergenerational dialogue audiotapes were transcribed verbatim. Information that could identify a participant was not included in the selected quotations. All transcriptions were reviewed using a grounded theory approach to qualitative research which shaped the analysis of the data. Through educational and rural community policy analysis, and discourse analysis of the Alberta Government Rural Community Initiative, I have gained an enriched understanding of influences on why youth choose to leave, stay, or return to rural communities, as well as the current political and economic context in Alberta. Further, I explored the connections to intergenerational learning as a way of offering local, rural alternatives and supports to address the problem of rural out-migration. With this data, I will build the framework to analyze themes and patterns from the results of the survey, interviews, observations, and focus groups.

As Seale (2005) emphasizes, organizing the 'data' and making decisions about which data are most relevant requires selection, and identifying 'patterns' (p. 306). I followed a method of stage-by-stage data analysis, based on Wellington's (2000) system: 1) Immersion to gain a sense of the data by listening to tapes, reading observational notes, and highlighting and annotating transcripts; 2) Reflecting to stand back from the data to create some distance for reflection; 3) Taking apart/Analyzing the data, breaking it into components and sections; 4) Categorizing or coding units and beginning to create categories for patterns and reoccurring themes to 'make sense of the data; 5) Organizing units of data into these themes and identifying those which do not fit; 6) Recombining/ Synthesizing the data in which I

will build on the constant comparative method of analysis to search for patterns, themes, regularities and similarities, as well as paradoxes, contrasts, and irregularities (See Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; and Wellington, 2000).

The next stage of analysis is 'relating and locating the data.' I position it in relation to other literature through constant comparison and contrast in areas of 'categories, methods and themes' that relies on knowing and understanding existing research (Wellington, 2000). This stage of the data analysis positions my study and relates it to the relevant existing literature, with the intention of making an original contribution to knowledge.

I use coding to improve the validity or credibility of the qualitative data, and to identify "negative instances" that may "contradict or develop an emerging theory" (Seale, 2005, p. 312-313). Indexing, or sorting the data in categories, is also used to code survey data (quantitative and qualitative). Responses are "indexed and categorized in the hope of discerning patterns or even of developing theory" (Wellington, 2000, p. 107). Using the data from each of my methods I respond to an evolving set of questions and reflections. I examine these further in a process generating new ideas and theory. This new understanding, based on the experiences of the community members, is known as grounded theory.

Modified Discourse Analysis and Grounded Theory

I draw on elements of discourse analysis as part of analyzing the transcripts from the dialogues (Fulcher, 2008; Potter, 1996). In order to understand the social interactions, I am attentive to the discourse, including the structure, the exchange of ideas, and social interactions. As I transcribe and deconstruct the dialogue transcripts, I identify discourses, or particular themes in the text. I consider the dynamics between the generations to look more closely at the power relationships that may impact youth engagement and participation. I am also interested in the social connections or social capital and how those can shape youth and adult roles in the community. Ultimately, I examined the transcripts to learn more about a sense of community or rural identity. For the purpose of this study, I focus on thematic analysis, identifying meaningful categories and themes in the data. Using the

grounded theory process, I compared and contrasted these themes with the findings from the survey and interview data and the dialogues. For example, I analyzed and interpreted the data from the dialogue transcripts and compared it with my participant observations and field notes from the dialogue process.

I applied a form of grounded theory to my data analysis where theory is based on data that is generated from real experiences. Grounded theory, according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) is "an inductive method of qualitative research which [allows] social theory to be generated systematically from data. That is, theories [are] 'grounded' in rigorous empirical research, rather than produced in the abstract" (Lacey and Luff, 2001, p.6). In other words, grounded theory as a methodology is a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data. The aim of a grounded theory approach is to develop new theory that is "grounded" in lived experiences. Previous assumptions about the research questions were examined through a process of reviewing the data and examining the relationships between the concepts (Piantanida, Tananis & Grubs, 2004). Thus, new knowledge was generated from this qualitative data. A persuasive argument for the validity of knowledge based on dynamic lived experiences is the rigorous process of conceptual coding and constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While there is evidence that theory can be generated and verified from qualitative data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) the perception that the legitimacy of grounded theory must be proven is a limitation. I argue that an interpretive, constructivist epistemology and methodology best respond to my research questions. These questions deal directly with how rural community members understand their experiences. Further, I recognize the expertise of community members to co-create meaning, while I work from my theoretical foundations and member checks to examine and interpret the data. I apply this process of grounded theory in my research as a useful set of tools for qualitative data analysis, but I am aware of the strengths and limitations of the approach.

Using a grounded theory approach, I reviewed the data and looked for key concepts that were familiar across interviews or dialogues. These concepts formed a coding structure including both concepts and themes that described the data. Specifically, I coded transcripts using comments and colours on the computer as well

as the old-fashioned method of highlighting and cutting. From the codes I formed categories and then broader themes to present the research findings. An example of a concept in the coding structure was attachment. Each interview transcript was read for sections in which the respondent spoke about attachment, and this section was coded as "attachment." After all the interviews were coded, each code was reviewed for common and contrasting themes among and across participants. This method and process of constant comparison of themes was conducted within each of the codes and across all codes until no new themes were identified. Themes were then organized into higher-level conceptual order, for example, experiences of coming home. A summary of preliminary findings was distributed to participants so that they could provide feedback.

Grounded theory focuses on a structured and detailed procedure for generating theory from the data, considering the plausible relationships among the sets of concepts in the data. It provides a set of testable propositions to help us understand rural communities more clearly. As part of my methodology, I start with a clear but broad research question. The research then proceeds in stages, with analysis beginning after the first stage of my fieldwork, or the survey. The data collected in the survey were used to inform community selection, and to develop the questions for the interview protocol for the semi-structured interviews. Qualitative and quantitative methods can be used within the same study at different stages (Lacey and Luff, 2001).

When analyzing qualitative data using grounded theory, Lacey and Luff (2001) describe the process with a constant comparative method at the core. Concepts and categories emerging from one stage of the data analysis are compared with those emerging in subsequent stages. With this method I looked for relationships between concepts and categories, constantly comparing them, to form the basis of the emerging theory. This process is cumulative rather than linear. It involves revisiting the data in light of new ideas that emerge as data collection and analysis progress (Lacey and Luff, 2001, p. 7). As they explain, the process of coding, clustering, and identifying a core category is continued until there are no new significant categories or concepts emerging. This system of constant comparison leads to core categories

and identification of core theory which can then be tested through reference to research and to social/cultural/economic factors that affect the area of study (Lacey and Luff, 2001). As a researcher, it is crucial to be sensitive to the theory, and to explore the potential to develop theory in the data through a creative but strategic approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The literature on grounded theory (Lacey and Luff, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) stresses the importance of grounding the interpretation through detailed data analysis.

Transcripts of the interviews were analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Data analysis was iterative with data collection. The process of coding was used to analyze the data as they were collected. Open coding was used to identify common themes. These themes were then examined in relation to the context and circumstances of living in a rural community, or reasons for staying, leaving and considering a return to a rural area. Survey data were used to inform the interview protocol, and then interviews were coded by conceptualizing patterns in the data. Initial data analysis guided further and more focused data collection, leading to further conceptualization of the data and code refinement. Similarities and differences in the compiled codes were examined and clustered together to create categories. Saturation was reached when no new categories emerged. Through this process of open coding and theoretical coding, a more refined understanding of the factors that impact rural communities and the process of working with youth and adults emerged. Notes on theory and process were kept throughout the coding to track conceptual ideas as they were occurring. These theoretical notes provided a basis for writing the grounded theory during the final phase of the analysis.

Ethical Considerations for Working with Research Participants

In this section, I describe four ethical considerations for my research. First, as a researcher working with youth I have been attentive to the notion of free and informed consent, and the extent to which the young person understands the implications of their involvement with the research (Leadbeater, 2006). An example in the rural community emerged when I spoke with the local high school teachers and

guidance counselor about identifying young people to participate in the dialogues. I reminded them that it was voluntary, participants must be 18 years old, and that the participants would not be paid or receive course credit. In addition, it was important for the students to understand that there was no incentive such as school credit attached to participation, but that they would be adding valuable perspectives to understanding rural youth migration and the ways in which they participate (or do not participate) in their rural community.

Further, the research conforms to the University of Alberta guidelines. I explained the research using meaningful, accessible language in personal interactions with research participants and in all written documentation (Yee & Andrews, 2007, p. 400). As part of the ethical dimensions of my research, I prepared a consent form, and verified with a young person that the language resonates with the age of the young people I interviewed (Appendix B). My written consent form included a letter of introduction with a clause indicating that participation is optional, and that participants may withdraw at any time. It included how the information gathered would be stored and used. All participants signed a written consent form, or indicated their consent by completing the survey on-line.

Second, I respect privacy and confidentiality. The letter of introduction includes a section indicating that the information is confidential and will be kept in a safe, secure location. The information about participants' names and details are coded and made anonymous. Third, I respect justice and inclusiveness. My thesis includes a sample of participants with respect for the culture, ethnicity, race and gender of participants. For example, in order for this thesis to reflect the reality of rural communities, I asked community organizations to help me select an inclusive sample that reflects community demographics, with the condition that the anonymity of the participants is protected. This is a key consideration in rural communities of less than 1,000 people, as many community members know each other. Although I was asked by several community members to name who else was participating, I told them that I could not name the participants. In a small community many participants may hear about who else is part of the study, but I kept this information confidential to the extent that it was possible in this context. Further, participant information has

been coded to protect their identity. Finally, I balanced harms and benefits. All steps were taken to limit any risks. Participating in this study posed no threat or harm. The benefits are significant, helping to create healthy communities where a younger generation of community members may choose to stay and contribute to their rural community.

Summary

In this chapter I described my methodology and epistemology and how it responds to the research questions. I discussed assumptions in the study design, and presented my personal epistemology and ontology. I described my research methods, sample, and participant selection, followed by data collection and analysis. In the following chapters I will examine, analyze and interpret the data, and describe how the survey, semi-structured interviews, and intergenerational dialogue approach addressed my research question: *How can an intergenerational dialogue framework enhance our understanding of the social, economic, educational, cultural and geographical (environmental) factors that influence rural youth migration?* My research objectives will be accomplished by analyzing the data and examining how it addresses my research questions.

Chapter 5 – Process as Outcome: Approaching the Community

This chapter of the thesis is focused on understanding and making sense of the initial research findings to set the foundation for dialogue. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how the process of constructing dialogues requires an understanding of the uniqueness and idiosyncratic nature of communities. This chapter reflects the process that I undertook as part of the discourse on community development that is attentive to different rural contexts. In the first half of the chapter, I explore the findings from the survey and how they inform the selection of the rural community for dialogue. The survey responses also provide insight into my research questions and theoretical foundations, and helped to shape the questions for the semi-structured interview protocol. First I present key themes from the survey which then informed the interview protocol questions for the semi-structured interviews. Second, I explore what the research participants said in the interviews about what it is like to live in a rural community, including their perspectives on rural out-migration, sense of belonging, and attachment. Third, I compare these responses with the theory to examine what theorists are saying about rural out-migration. The research participants as individuals respond to the issues broadly, while they also demonstrate a collective sense of community. Finally, I analyze the results and discuss how they contribute to building theory together based on these findings, in other words, co-constructing theory which is grounded in their lived experiences.

The second part of this chapter is divided into four sections. First, I share some of the challenges I faced early in the research process, specifically relating to recruitment and selection of participants for the research dialogues. Next I discuss some of the gaps between my initial ideas or 'ideal' proposal stage and the 'real' experience of gaining access to a rural community in which members did not have a point of reference that attests to my integrity as a researcher. The content here is all from the data collected. I then relate my experiences directly back to the data and explore how my outsider status (with insights into rural life) compares and contrasts with the connections to rural communities that rural respondents describe in the survey and interviews. Finally, I position this experience in the literature and

explore how this learning contributes new knowledge to the field of rural community development.

In this chapter, social factors illustrated in the survey and interview findings already begin to help me understand and explore several of my research questions and how an intergenerational dialogue might enhance our understanding of the factors that impact youth engagement and migration. Two of my research questions that are addressed here are: In what ways might social networks between youth/community leaders or mentors impact youth engagement in the rural community, and their decisions to stay, leave, or return?, and: How are the factors that may influence a younger generation of rural youth staying, leaving, or returning to their community identified by youth and adults/community leaders? In Chapter 7, I respond to my other research questions, and explore the impact of intergenerational dialogue in depth. In the next sections, I highlight some of the key contributions from the participants, and their own words.

Learning from Participants - Exploring Findings from the Survey

I begin now by examining themes from the survey responses, highlighting voices of rural young people using these quotations to help to unpack what was going on in the rural community. The survey findings contributed to two main areas: 1) community selection, including the context and issues to consider when selecting a rural community for the dialogues; and 2) engagement. The survey results emphasized engagement and connections between generations, and provided insight into strategies that might connect community members, such as town hall gatherings, and organizing rural community events that included both youth and adults in planning and action. Several youth participants named mentioned mentorship and dialogue as strategies to link generations. Significantly, the responses to the survey also convey push and pull *tensions* about home, identity, connections to the rural community, and future plans. I posit that these tensions echo some of the complexity of the insider/outsider membership role of researchers which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter. There is a complexity, a space in between, and tension inherent in this place for a researcher, but also for young community members. In the survey,

responses reflect lingering questions about a sense of rural identity combined with the respondents' connections to their current 'home'. The significant role of family, social factors, connections to the land and environment are highly relevant to my research questions, and became clearer to me when I participated and observed events in Kitscoty, which I describe later. I now highlight key survey findings.

The survey served two main purposes. First, the findings influenced the selection of the rural community in which to conduct the intergenerational dialogues, and second, the survey responses illustrated the central element of engagement Social factors and environmental/geographic factors were most prominent in the responses about the factors that impact rural youth connection to their rural communities. The emphasis that the survey respondents put on people and place is consistent with my understanding of rurality that includes a distinct rural culture shaped by geographical or environmental factors linking "place" and community participation (Orr, 2004), and McMillan and Chivas' (1986) sense of community – in this case, with a distinct rural identity.. Messages that youth hear in the community about whether to stay, leave, or return, were important to survey respondents, and the majority of respondents indicated that connections between youth and adults in the community were "very important." The concepts of engagement and participation that I discussed in detail in the previous chapter were also articulated in the survey as being important to young people formerly from rural communities. The findings that point to the importance of place, participation, and engagement in rural communities echo Orr's (2004) assertion that a sense of place is critical to engaging and participating in a community, an idea that was prominently articulated over a decade ago in Wotherspoon's (1995) foundational work on a connection to place and identity.

The survey responses provide insights into my central research question about how an intergenerational dialogue might enhance our understanding of the factors that impact youth engagement and migration. It is important to note that the survey respondents were predominantly post-secondary students or graduates who had left rural communities to pursue post-secondary education or employment. The purpose of the survey was to understand the migration patterns

and perspectives of rural youth currently studying in postsecondary settings. The majority of the survey respondents (more than 80%) listed postsecondary education as their highest form of formal education, and they were recruited through post-secondary school faculties. Obviously this is a small sample of those who have left rural communities, but their responses provide critical insight into how they perceive their rural community and when or why they might return.

Given their current levels of formal education, more than 50% of survey respondents see themselves "in an urban setting, for work" in the future. While this finding might not be surprising, one of the findings from the survey was the response to the question, "If there was your dream job in a rural community, would you return?" More than 60% of survey respondents replied "yes." Although employment is a key factor in the literature for why youth might leave rural communities, this explanation is incomplete. The open-ended survey questions add meaning to this finding. Often there are contrasting examples that demonstrate the internal and external struggles, pressures, and seemingly conflicting messages youth receive about their roles and pathways. What is most intriguing is the various ways that youth self-identify and describe themselves in relation to their rural community as member, on the margins, or a non-member. I present some of the key findings here to highlight the layers of understanding that lead up to the dialogues.

For every open-ended survey response there are often two contrasting ends of a spectrum, and then less extreme variations. For example, one respondent's extended answer talked about "memories and history of the place I grew up and where three generations of our family have been" while another indicated that the factors listed in the survey were "missing for me in my rural community." Adding to these tensions is the sense of not being able to return, for some, while holding a certain reverence for the place and people:

> While the community of people are extremely important to me, I don't believe that I could ever return to the community where I grew up and lived until I was 18. Ironically, I don't know that this community would be accepting of me and some of my choices (including my choice of spouse, who is of a different faith). I value the people in my community very much, and I like that it is a place that is, in its own way, trying to be

proactive and supportive. I can very much appreciate that the culture is rich and important, mostly centred around church.

Further, a respondent described it this way, "The small communities I came from consisted mostly of people of similar ethnic backgrounds and religion. Families were tight and old so that newcomers or families who were not "in" had a hard time being accepted. This meant that the same people, with same mind sets and the same ideas were always controlling and influencing the areas." Others noted challenges like community members struggling with alcoholism, drugs and violence. Some participants mentioned seasonal work and difficulty staying motivated and energetic in the slow-paced winter months. Development brings other challenges, and as one participant described, "Many of the issues I like to keep up with aren't "local" issues, so aren't considered relevant." Though some listed very positive aspects of rural life, others could easily name aspects they would change: "Sure, I'd like to make it even more culturally accepting, socially just, economically viable for those wishing to work with the land, politically robust and fair, environmentally sensitive and full of more family/friends."

Some communities were described as "very close-minded and religious…" or they "frowned on anyone who didn't go to church service and didn't fit the perfect family…" These dynamics, as well as being a "newcomer" even after 8 years in the community, were named as struggles, and one survey respondent described the general "red neck" culture in these terms: "it is not too appealing to me… I find sometimes small town culture, especially growing up, is very closed-minded, discriminatory, violent, sexist, racist, and destructive." Others would love to see more diversity in the culture and people in small towns or mentioned the struggles for minorities growing up in rural communities. For others, limited access to high speed internet is on their mind as a challenge (outside of town, only dial-up is available), or they worry about missing out on experiences in urban centers (shows, plays, festivals, etc.), as a limitation.

For some survey respondents, leaving involves a pull and subtle tensions, "I wish I was just based in one place and not feeling such a strong connection for two or more places"; or forging new connections, "I am finding that I am

building new relationships with community members that I didn't really pay attention to when I was living there" while others stated specific reasons for staying away "I am queer and wouldn't want to live in a small town" or being part of a "small family farm type that is no longer economically feasible in the current global market". A few heart-breaking examples were also shared in the survey: "Actually, peer pressure, in the form of bullying and personally not really fitting in as a teenager, largely shaped my desire to leave the community as a teen" and "Only in the last decade have I seriously considered returning to the community." Others mentioned that they were encouraged to pursue post-secondary education, but youth did not always feel respected or accepted after they had received this training. Those who speak of the spaces between communities, or on the margins, offer new ways of thinking about rural identity, sense of community, and belonging.

On the positive side, participants named many assets: A rural community provides a great opportunity to enrich life by the many personal interactions with others in the community. It is like an extended family. The pace is relaxed, the independence of young children is enhanced, and the expectations of youth to succeed are part of the culture. Teachers care about students. Education, employment, shopping and recreational opportunities may be limited and hence many youth will move away. But there is a movement of young families back into some rural communities Many participants stated their strong belief in the importance of rural communities, and a sense of rural identity, despite challenges and fragmentation:

> In my opinion, there isn't enough discussion happening about rural kid migration. To me, it is so obvious when I am with urban friends that we come from such a different social and cultural background. The differences are not always obvious, but they are there. I struggle to preserve my rural identity many years away from my home town. Does the fact that I am choosing to live and work in an urban centre make me less of a rural kid? I don't think so, but I worry that this identity and the values that come with it will erode over time.

While the dialogues that I discuss later did not reveal economic hardship as a struggle in that particular community, the survey and interview findings indicate that these are

real tensions in many rural places. My experience talking with the survey respondents in the follow-up interviews also revealed a range of factors that impacted the decision to "come home" and in some cases, even bring a spouse back to the rural community. However, these are complex questions. I have included a small sample of survey responses to demonstrate a range of opinions and patterns that are emerging in the data. These patterns contribute to a more nuanced understanding of factors that contribute to a vibrant rural community. These findings also suggest ways in which an "outsider" or newcomer to a rural community might be made to feel welcome. In this way, survey respondents are already contributing to theory development about what factors contribute to a sense of community, membership and belonging. From these responses I have identified three key themes, 1) Rural Identity; 2) Connection to Land, Nature and Environment; and 3) Ties with Family and History.

Rural Identity is the first key theme in the survey responses, as expressed in the quotation, "It is an identity – who I am." Other examples within the survey recognize the importance of identity and diversity and several mention the importance of a large First Nations population. A sense of home and belonging are also evident in the survey data and will be explored further in the dialogues. As one survey respondent describes, rural lives are often intertwined, where adults and youth mix at various events. They noted that this gives some opportunity for discussions between the generations. "I love rural communities, the sense of connection…" However, there were also barriers to this sense of belonging, such as "close-mindedness," a lack of diversity in some areas, and as one survey respondent put it, it can be a "struggle to preserve my rural identity many years away from my home town…I worry that this identity and the values that come with it will erode over time". This unique rural identity is an area that I would like to probe more in the interviews and dialogues.

A second theme, a c*onnection to land, nature and environment,* is expressed as "space," and "freedom,"a sense of place and land:

> What makes rural home for me is that there is a greater ability for me to
> feel a part of my place. By this I mean that I believe that we are a part of a
> place whether we realize it or not we need the land and are a part of it and
> it is easier to interact with the land in a healthy manner in rural areas. I

also believe there is a great understanding of place and land known or unknown by those who live there and so there is a lot to learn from. Family and friends are also important in that they are a part of what has created who you are and how you see and interact with the place around you.

The ideas expressed in this quotation were also reflected in conversations that I had with rural community members. A connection to the land and place were apparent, as was a link back to the social factors or rural community life, such as family and friends who had stayed in the community. Survey respondents had many concrete suggestions for engaging youth and adults in this area. One suggested that "there needs to be more education related to stewardship and environmental responsibility, including sustainability for all age groups" such as a focus on "Green Communities" and other educational guides. Many participants speak about with pride about their communities and natural environment. For many, these experiences are transported with them to their chosen community as part of their rural "identity" or the activities with which they choose to be involved.

A third finding expressed in the survey, *ties with family and history*, is revealed in the quotations. Many of these same ideas were echoed in the informal conversations I had with community members as I set up the community dialogue. "My home needs to allow me to have access to the things I love to do, and needs to be close to my family" claimed one survey respondent, while another noted that "Family is the biggest for me. As they dissipated, the connection did as well." Further, *community resources and a sense of security* are expressed as critical to a sense of home, including "…a great place to raise a family, safety, freedom for children to go and come, sports for kids, community events, know[ing] people on the street and at stores…show choir opportunities for high school youth, and a parent link centre." Local recreation opportunities and safety were factors mentioned in the survey and subsequent interviews. Finally, the rural survey respondents claimed that *friends and relationships are central,* as these quotations poignantly express: "Most of my friends from the area I have lost touch with since moving for school, so the "friends" factor means more family friends and high school," and "Family and friends are also

important in that they are a part of what has created who you are and how you see and interact with the place around you."

Many rural participants in this study indicated that a rural community is an ideal place to raise a family. This emphasis on the social fabric, or the social factors, tells a more complete story than theory alone. Bonner (1999) challenges the assumption of rural communities as "a great place to raise kids" and the romantic ideal of the 'rural' as he examines the historical and contemporary rural-urban debate. He maintains that a distinctive rural culture is difficult to quantify. The question, what is rural, or rurality was asked of me during the course of this writing, while Bonner (1999) asked similar questions about how rurality has been constructed in social theory and philosophy. Rural participants themselves responded to this question in many ways, including such claims as "it is who I am" (culture and identity) and "it's where I am from, and my ancestors are buried there" (geography, place). The research methods I use in this study, including direct input from participants through surveys, interviews, and dialogue, contribute to a more complex understanding of "what is rural" by understanding what is significant to the residents of rural communities, and demonstrate Bonner's (1999) assertion that an interpretive approach that combines dialogue and analytic methods can deepen our understanding of the intersections between theory and practice.

How would you rate this connection to your rural community? Over half of the survey participants maintain a strong connection to their rural community: 20% answered "Very Strong"; more than 40% replied "strong", 30% somewhat strong, and 20% "not very strong". This finding indicates that there is a connection to the rural community for those who have left. Dialogue offers one approach to explore how these links might be maintained and strengthened. Through dialogue between generations, barriers to return might also be examined.

I have illustrated that a sense of community, place and belonging is prominently described in scholarly literature, and this sense of "home" is echoed in the survey. The tensions of parallel or competing ideas of home are also revealed. More than 40% of respondents consider "home" to be both their rural

home community and the community in which they are studying now. More than half of respondents were in their home community less than a month ago. This is significant because it speaks to the ties back to the rural community, and indicates that if efforts are made to maintain these relationships between generations, there may be increased likelihood of return. Dialogue and the in-depth interviews explore these ideas of home on a deeper level.

Social and environmental/geographic factors were the most important ties back to rural communities for rural participants who have left rural communities. In survey responses to the question, "What makes this rural place home for you?" more than 80% of survey respondents named family as "very important". More than 80% listed land (geographic) as "important" to "very important," and more than 70% indicated that environmental connections to the rural community were "important" or "very important".

Social factors, such as family and friends, and environmental/geographic factors rated the highest as what respondents liked most about their rural community, while participants indicated that political and economic factors were those which they would most like to change. The dialogue offered a forum for talking more about these social factors and kinship ties. Not surprizing, parents rated highest as those who influenced the pathways of respondents, but it did surprise me to note that respondents also claimed to make these decisions on their own. The influence of teachers is important, while messages received from peers and other community members rate much lower in the survey. A limitation of a survey is the lack of description in responses. However, there were some sharply contrasting views revealed in the survey that add another layer of understanding about reasons youth leave, and add depth to the dialogues and interviews. Many of the young people who have stayed in rural communities indicated that the choices of peers did influence what they did after high school, and many have settled into rural community life with support from others with whom they attended school and played sports. The dialogues offer a deeper quest into how and why youth make the choices to stay or leave.

More than 80% of survey respondents indicated that the messages they received were to "leave to pursue education or employment" and over 40% were encouraged to leave to experience life outside the community. More than 40% of survey respondents heard messages about leaving to find work, nearly half were encouraged to "stay in the rural community and have a family", while less than half were encouraged to "stay in the rural community to work". A limitation of the survey is that youth may hear multiple and competing messages, and the interview and dialogues add deeper insight into competing priorities or directions.

Many of the survey respondents were encouraged to leave to study in an urban setting. While this is a familiar theme in the literature, it is only part of the picture. For those who responded to the question indicating that they were encouraged to leave, more than half were encouraged to return to their rural community. This is a very significant finding because it offers hope for return. The open-ended survey responses add other dimensions and tensions to this finding. For youth who have left, is there potential for return? The survey responses provide insights into my central research question about youth migration and factors that might impact youth engagement, while the intergenerational dialogues offer different angles to these responses about how and why to engage youth, and demonstrate a way to engage community members in these conversations.

One of the most important findings from the survey was an expressed interest in building connections between youth and adults. While family ties may be strong, there was a need expressed for building these connections. Survey respondents noted that community events build relationships. Some examples of positive connections were multi-generational families in community, youth performing for older generations and supported in sporting endeavours by community, sports leagues run by older generation, and youth encouraged to give service to seniors. Others mentioned conflicts between teens and seniors in their town, or "the relationships are positive, but the youth are typically transient" or positive engagement in drama and sports, but evidence of "bored, angry youth". While some survey respondents cautioned that youth might not attend a meeting

with adults, others listed concrete ideas such as "one-to-one mentorship type relationships," community forums, dialogues or town hall meetings. Most importantly, "Youth could be invited and taken seriously in planning meetings". The survey participants also indicated that conversations can occur in "ordinary" or common settings, like around the dinner table, or a more formalized setting that creates a deliberate space to engage.

Learning with Participants - Exploring Findings from the Interviews

Consistent with the survey findings, memories and a sense of place were vivid throughout the interviews, especially the vastness of the sky and the sense of silence and space. Ben's words describe this attachment to the land, but also the messages or assumptions he felt growing up:

> …Well…in the early years I remember what I wanted to be when I grew up was a farmer 'cause my grandpa was my hero so that was always a thrill to go ride around with the tractor and I was definitely encouraged to have a part in those kinds of things but as I grew older that definitely… I guess partly became less of an interest but also the message or the assumption was that I would leave for education but with [a regional college in the next community] I didn't have to go too far.

Like this respondent, many participants mentioned grandparents, parents and teachers, coaches as having a potential impact on their sense of belonging to the community. This finding is consistent with my research question about intergenerational connections, so I was interested to find out how and in what ways these adults might impact their sense of belonging, and ultimately youth migration. Several participants mentioned key women in the community where they grew up who had the best of intentions and "really do care" about them. I asked them how community members communicated that they cared about them. They expressed that when they are back in the rural community some people ask specific questions that show that they have an interest in their life and that they are paying attention. For example, on participant mentioned a lady in the community who always asks what she is reading. This finding deepens our understanding of how adults can support youth in rural communities by taking an interest in their lives and choices. History is also important here, specifically a shared sense of history of the place and their family

ties. In that way, participants explained to me, these relationships are different from any other relationships in their lives. However, several respondents mentioned if they return they are "visiting the place more than the people". Results from the survey help to make this statement more explicit.

The distinctions in the survey and interviews are important because they point to the tensions and ambiguities of rural youth identity – as an individual and as a part of a collective identity. In some cases young people articulated a sense of autonomy and decision-making power, while at other times; there is a sense of needing to put the community needs first, and not having a lot of choice or agency. Some participants described rural values and how they have learned how to live in community as a result of being part of their rural community. This was often described as a unique asset or even a "huge gift," and many participants expressed that others who grew up in an urban setting may not have that same "sense of community". Skills such as the social skill of being inclusive or including people were mentioned by interview participants. Sarah described understanding difference and how to work with difference, not having a choice about who your community is and having a role in shaping it, rather than being able to remain anonymous.

Interview participants explained that identity may be shaped by a large family, especially when teachers and local community members assume you are part of that family or social group, including church or prominent clubs like hockey or activities like rodeo. These assumptions can be problematic, and as one participant described, there can be assumptions about what you believe in and the ways you will be involved. One example was assumptions of religious beliefs well into adulthood and the time when this young person was a "free and critical thinker". Rural community was described as shaping positive aspects of identity and practical skills about how to live with people and understand people, but it also brought hard lessons in motivations and how people can rationalize their behaviour to survive. Sarah adds, "I had to really learn a lot about myself when I left because I didn't have that circle. So I think I actually left really not understanding where I ended and others began."

"My voice and my body feel more at home on the prairies" described one participant. The sense of membership and belonging is clear in the words, "…talking to people, I can feel myself falling into that voice even right now just talking about these things, like I notice my actual voice changes just because that's where I grew up and that's how I grew up." When asked what it is like to be part of both worlds, including a cosmopolitan university campus, Gio elaborated:

> It's difficult, it really is. The difficulty lies in **being a member of both communities at different times**. It's almost like having different hats or two faces or something split about it. One foot in one, I'm just speaking metaphor, I don't actually really know how to describe it because I exist and belong in both communities without existing and belonging in either because of the split nature of it. I would definitely say I feel a lot more at home with the rural Albertan kind of community, like that's home. I don't feel at home walking in the halls of the [drama centre] as much as I do when I hit Highway 21.

Membership in multiple communities was a tension raised by many participants. Kymlicka's (1995) analysis of identity and rights illustrates the idea of citizenship as multidimensional, rooted in individual experiences, connecting the individual to broader society and culture. The intergenerational dialogues in rural communities offer a way to explore connections as important tenants of groups and society (p.80-81). These connections may include rural and urban communities, academic and non-academic environments, and participants at times have feet in both worlds. How much simpler it would be, as one participant explained, "If I could choose just one…" Intergenerational dialogue strengthens how individuals and groups in society might relate to each other, accounting for connections or a sense of membership in a number of different communities, (that may include different homes or contexts), and encourages diversity in background, experience and age. Reading from Kymlicka (1995) I propose that rurality or rural identity, is a distinct "culture" similar to any societal culture that includes the history, traditions, and conventions specific to a society, and the set of social practices and institutions that are associated with the societal culture. These individuals are part of a rural community, and have influence and

responsibility for shaping policy that impacts their lives and strengthens their rural culture.

These connections between membership, belonging, and identity are apparent throughout the quotations from participants. There are tensions also related to membership and belonging. These tensions and difficulties are key areas to explore in greater depth in the dialogues. With belonging is the flip side of alienation, and interview participants described both of these tensions. When asked if the rural community felt like where they belonged, several interview participants explained that the more formal education that you get, the more *alienated* you are from that community, and then also alienated from an education community because you grew up in a rural community. In a similar vein, faith communities and sports teams or local events were held up as examples of places that bring communities together, but they can also create a sense of exclusion. As one participant described, there may be very powerful expectations of how you will participate, or it is seen you are "going against the norm." These statements are a powerful testament to the ways that organizations and social groups function to include or exclude within the rural communities, much as they do in broader society. As this participant described, in an urban center there are more options to participate in different ways, and perhaps less expectation to conform.

Appadurai (1995) describes a process of seeking and expanding world views as "cosmopolitanism," often defined as "a certain cultivated knowledge of the world beyond one's immediate horizons," and are the "product of deliberate activities associated with literacy, the freedom to travel, and the luxury of expanding the boundaries of one's own self by expanding its experiences." By describing it this way, cosmopolitanism is often set up as a counterpoint to the idea of rootedness, or "provincialism" often associated with rural stayers - attachment to one's own friends, one's own group, one's own language, one's own country and even one's own class - and a certain lack of interest in crossing these boundaries. In this study, there are examples of both of these phenomena.

The cosmopolitan is often identified with the exiled, the traveler, the seeker of the new, who is not content with his or her historically derived identity, biography and cultural values (Appadurai, 1995). While cosmopolitanism is associated with exploration, openness and globalization, it also may be applied to a rural study that examines the ideas of hybrid identities, "cultural" transfers and exchanges. The idea of expanding boundaries was often mentioned by participants, and the tensions inherent in this expansion were often a source of discomfort, even if they ultimately lead to growth and new experiences. The risk or complexities and uncertainties of the process of transformation and negotiating work and social relations are explored by Beck (2006) in the multiple struggles for a sense of individualism and membership. While there is an urge, with a blessing from society (and often the rural community) for youth to be seen as an individual, rather than part of a group, the individual is then faced with an unmediated role in society. These tensions are evident in shifts to cosmopolitan and modernism that (Appadurai, 1995; Beck, 2006) that some of the participants describe in this study as their reorientation to urban or academic environments. The "urge to expand one's current horizons of self and cultural identity" is explained by Appadurai (1995) as a wish to resist the boundaries of class and neighbourhood, to connect with a wider world in the name of values which, in principle, could belong to anyone and apply in any circumstance. However, there is also a desire for a sense of belonging expressed in the interviews – belonging to a rural community that McMillan and Chavis (1986) call a "sense of community" and Appadurai describes as a "known or knowable place."

Intergenerational dialogue embodies the view discussed earlier of extending boundaries that begin with the local experiences and stretching these boundaries to offer hope and new directions by thinking beyond boudaries. It is consistent with adult learning methodology that begins with lived experiences at a local level, but moves from the individual to collective experience. This view, and the process of dialogue, have social and political implications, and extend the boundaries of participation to include rather than exclude members. As Appaduai (1995) explains, an inclusive view that extends cultural and geographical horizons "is thus closely tied

to the politics of hope and the promise of democracy as a space of dignity as well as of equality.

What would have to shift in order for young people to feel they belong in rural communities? Sarah describes what she calls a "several pronged approach" including an explicit municipal or town council political message that is shared with those who left saying "this is the kind of community that we want, this is the vision we have and it's not just about economics, it's not just about attracting specific people" it is broader approach that is about what we value in our communities, what is really important. In addition, both survey and interview participants discussed the role that community members can play in have in helping them see possibilities and find a place in the rural community, while accepting and encouraging them to expand their understand of the world beyond the rural boundaries.

The anticipation and joy of coming home was a common experience expressed by interview participants, though balanced at times in the findings with examples of siblings who felt differently, who could not wait to leave, "to get the hell out" as one rural young person expressed in a conversation, or who felt more at home in their new community. One interview respondent told me after the interview that there is nothing there in the rural community for him now.   These stories of severance from the rural community indicate that there are those who left who choose not to return, which is consistent with the literature on rural out-migration that I described in my first chapters. As I indicate in my final chapter, participants who agreed to be interviewed or responded to the survey self-selected, and had complex motivations to be involved. Despite a range of experiences and attitudes about rural communities that I was able to hear, in the future it would provide additional insight into the research questions to speak with more youth and adults who have faced barriers or chosen to distance themselves from their rural community. Sherman and Sage (2011) use the concept of "brain drain" to discuss the social and economic landscape and why youth might view success as staying or leaving. The findings from my interview data suggest that

we look at "success" and opportunities for youth in broader terms, and pay close attention to supports and barriers as they make their choices.

A sense of community that included membership and agency was also evident in the interviews. Many participants described the joy of living in a rural community, especially living on a farm, or visiting grandparents' farms, while others stressed the "sense of community" that combined a place and people. There were values related to this finding which I wish to explore further. Does this pride and sense of possibility extend to stewardship? Often connections to a rural place were described as "a really good way to grow up" and something important. Many respondents describe the connection as a place they spent their whole life. Sarah describes the connection this way, "I spent my whole life there 'til I was 18 in the same house, the same land and in the same community. It really shaped who I am." She names the biggest benefit as "that real sense of having a community or a sense of the place where I lived." Several participants, however, mentioned that they felt disconnected to the local communities because they went to school in one community, shopped in another small town, and played sports in yet another area. In other instances, they felt a sense of disconnect because their interests were very different from others in the area.

One participant spoke of her horse ranch and strong connections to the land and animals, though other kids in school did not understand the appeal. A few participants did not experience strong connections to the closest rural community because of long commuting distances from farms. Although there are many patterns in the interview data, the voices of these interview participants also include outliers who may have been excluded in rural communities and had strong motivations to leave. These opinions and experiences add insight into deeper layers of the issues of youth engagement and migration, and bring some of the underlying issues to light.

Engagement and participation often included involvement in the social fabric of rural community life. Many respondents identified participating in community activities such as volunteering, being involved with local town council, playing on team sports, and being part of their children's school and extra-curricular activities as

a key part of their connection and engagement with rural community life. In this sense, participants described possibilities of being involved in their rural communities. As Sarah expressed, engagement goes beyond participation:

> In addition to that participation or that activity, I think it is when youth are really genuinely interested in the outcome of what's going on in their community. Not just within their own peer group but also in you know some of the issues at large and they're asking questions about why things are the way that they are. I think it is a little bit about putting others before themselves.

As Karolina, another interview respondent elaborated, one can be "engaged without participating," and others claimed that although it is not common, you can participate without being particularly engaged. Many of the participants stated that social factors and volunteering specifically benefit rural community life, and are potential reasons to stay or return.

The most cited reasons to stay were security and family, with some emphasis on potential for employment and a lower cost of living. Most often interviewees mentioned family connections or a choice to have children in the rural community with anticipated family support. For some, ill or aging family members may draw them back, at least for a while, while others may return home for security, or because it is the default or the "safe" option. A significant factor was cost of living. Sometimes they "gave another life a shot" and it either did not work out, or home is always a place you can return to if you are uncertain of the next steps. In this way it may be viewed as a launching pad to prepare for the next venture, or a soft place to land. In some cases, respondents explained that young people have debt and "it's cheap to live there." It still is a struggle to make these choices. While family and raising children in a rural place was mentioned as the most important factor regarding staying or returning to a rural area, the importance of a spouse or partner (and their potential career) one cannot overlook. Potential for spouses to find employment and feel welcomed in the rural community was mentioned frequently in the interviews and surveys. In some cases differing cultural, ethnic, or religious backgrounds within partner

relationships meant that it might be harder to adapt to a smaller community, and young people formerly from a rural area chose to stay in a city.

Love, for some, is a key reason to stay or return. However, speculation about why friends might have chosen to stay, or what might make a young person consider staying in the rural community were as varied as the participants. As Leah responded, maybe they *inherited some land* and so they are doing what their parents did before them, or farming. She explained that the community itself is a "nice enough town". Leah elaborated that the cost of living might also be a factor as she noted "I know a few people who have bought places there and moved in there, it's a little *cheaper maybe and it's still readily accessible to the city* so I think for some people maybe that's a bonus." [Emphasis added].

While the literature and findings from the survey and interview data indicate that services or infrastructure might be part of the puzzle to encourage young adults to stay in or move to a rural community, these were not the major factors, or were often mentioned in combination with the social factors such as family or children. Basic services like libraries and a coffee shop were mentioned as important, in addition to schools and health services, but often in combination with the presence of a few other young people in that community and opportunities for work. The piece that respondents found harder to quantify was the idea of community members' personal happiness, and acceptance of others in the community. The importance of this was explained to me as a ripple effect on every aspect of community life. For example, if a young person visited a community and was deciding whether or not they wanted to live there, one indicator might be an observation of people who are busy with their own lives and content enough with their own choices that they are not criticizing others. If they are critical, are they still taking an interest in others, and encouraging others to engage or connect with the community? As it was described in the findings, supporting others signifies a healthy community, pride or self-actualization, where people focus on friendships and community building as part of their lives. There is no specific outcome in mind as a result of participation, nor should participating be a burden or "cross to bear." Rather it is part of what makes a

community vibrant. Participants explained that this dynamic also opens spaces for diversity or difference within the rural community, and provides a safer place for strangers to feel welcome. This portrait exemplifies for me what might be missing from some rural communities. Safe and Caring community initiatives emerge as one practical approach to strengthen this kind of vibrant, healthy community. This example provides evidence that, although economics matter, acceptance and the social capital in rural communities is much deeper than the economic terms. I imagine that those who have left might also feel safe to return to a rural community focused on elements of inclusion and care.

Although many of the interview participants discussed land as a crucial connecting point to their rural area, it also appears in the questions raised about potential return. Who will be the stewards of the land? What is to become of rural spaces? Abram offers this insight:

> If I was back farming, I'd take a trade, work 5 years, heavy equipment, welding, and earn some money and apply it. Then, if you want to take a trade back to the land, you've got skills. But you know - it's a totally different world. My grandpa went to Hemp Hill tractor school in Winnipeg and Edmonton in 1923…1924. He was schooled in mechanics and tractors, and then went back to farm and to use that education. Now there's no incentive to go back and 'suck slough water'. What's happening to the land? I heard about a manufacturing plant in Tofield, on some of the best agricultural land. They're hiring immigrant labour from China and building a complex…totally changing the face of farming. I call it "industrial agriculture." We can't keep up with that. It's some of the best farm land. It's complicated. Those farmers are trading in on short-term profit on land that might be profitable and grow wheat for 100 years or more if we took care of it.

What is most significant to this study is the assertion that fewer youth see a future in rural areas, depleting the intergenerational connections to the land and rural communities; large numbers see no future in farming or local, small-scale food production. This creates reason for despair even while it opens space to consider community-based alternatives that respond to input and decision-making from a younger generation. Abram is one of many rural youth who now work in the trades. Like some of the interview participants, he grew up on a farm, and now lives in an urban centre. He provides a contemporary portrait of the impact

development and rural out-migration in Alberta, relating it to various aspects of oil sands "boom" and "bust," and complements the evidence from the literature with a human face and adds another dimension of loss and regret in contrast to the dialogues in Kitscoty:

> I keep wrestling with regret, but I never felt that the rural community was my home. Maybe if it had been in interior BC or Northern Saskatchewan, the wilderness may have drawn me in, but the loyalty is just not there; there's no future in farming. A real advantage, if you're a young person bent on farming, is to get a heavy equipment ticket, work in Fort McMurray, apprentice, and go back to farm – then you have the advantage of being able to fix your own machinery. But then, what's the incentive to go back? What's difficult now is that it never has been a moral dilemma before, but considering our times, and that we're fueling a war…I realize I'm just a cog in a [swearing] global machine. I'm trying to balance how we fit into this economy with what I want for my kids – better opportunities, education…options. That's the word. Options. That's what we've got now.

These words add a real life dimension to the pressures discussed in Chapter 2, and the struggles of rural development. These issues both confirm and deepen the content of the dialogue and the value of learning together with youth.

Youth who participated in the survey (and in subsequent interviews) demonstrated an interest in engaging in the discussion about how to strengthen rural communities. A dialogue process that includes all participants as equal partners in the process, rather than the youth or adults members being "consulted" offers a method to build on the survey results to explore my research questions through dialogue. Like Kent and Taylor (2002), I emphasize collaboration and equity in this process. Although I will facilitate the process of bringing participants together, they are considered equal in their participation. By creating a forum to listen and learn, the dialogue process provides a space for deeper engagement to understanding how communities share what Miller (2003) describes as values, issues, and collective identity that may add depth and breadth to my research questions.

An interview respondent offered these words that offer deeper insight into the survey findings, and an entry point to this discussion of the tensions that rural youth face:

> I'd love to live a more simple life. It's that simple. It feels like life is complicated in the big city. I don't know and it probably isn't, it's probably just a perception I have. It's just maybe a child's understanding of what the world was and I kind of idealized that and maybe it doesn't actually exist…

Is rural life simpler? In what ways might this perception be true, and to what extent is it a romantic ideal of the family farm or a tree-lined street with a church on the corner and Friday night community potlucks? Neighbours helping each other. Does that exist? Abram's words provide a counterpoint as they illustrate the complexity of rural youth migration, and support for the 'facts' illustrated in the literature:

> The problem as I see it is that I know there are young people making some big money. Not just "chicks and glory." The local Domo isn't open because they've had a hard time getting workers. Who is going to go back to making $10 an hour or even $18 when they can make $25 with no [post-secondary] education? You've got kids dropping out without Grade 12 to hit the oil patch, but that life is harsh. Do you have any idea? It's hard. You think it's going to last forever? I'm in it, and I'm going hard, but it's gotta bust…

These words are harsh. The cycles of boom and bust that he speaks about are very real and as he explains, he is living right in the middle of tough choices. These concrete examples of the factors that influence the paths that young people take, and how they wrestle with their choices provide a way to engage with the theory in new and interesting ways. I am left with lingering questions about how participants would theorize about their own lived experience, and how they might draw connections between existing theories, their own reality, and contribute new ideas about rural youth out-migration. These stories provide evidence for how a dialogue between rural community members might deepen our understanding of these dilemmas. It is clear that new insights could be gained by including youth and adults from various sectors and with very different backgrounds. Might those community connections or a sense of unity exist in an urban setting? I argue that one can create the dynamics of a healthy community in either arena, but key elements of community development must be present. Bhattachararyya's (2004) notion of community development including solidarity and equity at the core is

essential to this vision. I now explore findings from the survey and interviews by connecting them to the theoretical foundations.

Connecting the Findings and the Conceptual Framework

In this section, the key findings are interpreted using the elements derived from the theoretical foundations discussed in Chapter 3. I also use additional elements of attachment and identity theory derived from interpretation and analysis of the data. The purpose of this interpretation is to understand the underlying factors associated with engagement in rural communities, explore the way that intergenerational connections might enhance this learning, and understand how youth and adults contribute to developing their own theories around local issues such as rural youth migration. As I have outlined previously, the seven elements of the conceptual framework are: 1) A Sense of Community; 2) Social Capital; 3) Engagement; 4) Dialogue; and 5) Power and Privilege; 6) Conscientization; and 7) Context, which for the purpose of this study, includes the specific community, and is attentive to factors that impact the community, such as its history, location, and social, cultural, geographic/environmental, and economic features.

The importance of building trust and cohesion, or what the literature and many participants referred to as a 'sense of community,' was a key finding in the survey data and in the semi structured interviews. Both youth and adult respondents elaborated on what it means to belong to a community, and how this connection might impact if the community is a place they would like to stay. Similar to the dialogues, the in-depth interviews reflect the four elements of a sense of community that McMillan and Chavis (1986) postulated. The community dialogues provided insight into all four areas: 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration and 4) fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. In the dialogues, participants most often made reference to their sense of community or membership through participation in voluntary activities that contributed to the fabric of rural community life. The interviews, on the other hand, provided a range of examples and elaborated on these methods of engagement. There are many examples of fluid and multi-faceted identities, and of constructing an identity that 'fits' in a rural setting.

Elizabeth, a key stakeholder interviewee, stated it clearly through her statement that "I thought I'd be a farm wife and a mom and that would be the fulfillment of what I'd do, but then I started volunteering – when you participate you are definitely a part of a rural community."

Several participants examined their split roles between rural life and life outside the rural community, and how their rural upbringing contributed to understanding what "community means". As Gio explained:

> This *idea of community and what that means to me*...I don't feel like I receive that inside of the academic area. I feel like I receive more of that sense of community outside of it. I don't know, there's something about *pride* that falls into it, and I feel like in the rural context that it came from, the pride is more for the group and more for the entire community and about where you're from and about what you're doing and that's where the pride stems from. Whereas it feels like a lot of times in the academic community that the pride stems from your individual accomplishments…to me it feels like it detracts from the ultimate goal of an academic community because it feels like the academic community should be striving for a *collective consciousness* that will help the world. That's kind of where I see academia fitting in and it feels kind of counterproductive that it feels like more individual accomplishments are celebrated than what we can do as a community. [Emphasis added].

The collective consciousness that this participant speaks about is consistent with a membership and a collective sense of community. Pride for the entire community is named as important. This participant did not feel he received this message inside an academic context, but rather, from the rural context, which is consistent with the writing of Dew and Law (1995) mentioned previously. Further, many participants named parents or community leaders as role models in the community. Often parents and educators had influential messages to share with the young people. What were these messages from parents or others growing up in the community, and how did they communicate about what it might mean to stay or what it might mean to leave?

The respondents identified potential barriers to involvement. To illustrate this point, some participants asked, "What happens when the needs of the community do not match your interests?" For example, one interviewee, Sarah, noted a crossroads between what the community finds meaningful and what she finds meaningful in terms of how she engages with the rural community. As she claimed "where they

intersect is where I belong". She elaborated "…for example, a helping ethic… if someone's sick, you make them a loaf of bread, or tea, or a casserole…and I kind of have that too…when I go home I get that, going to get the mail, saying hi…" and yet a gap exists as she expresses that "understanding who I am is also important to me and the community isn't interested in that." In response to the question about how much intergenerational connections matter…" she claimed that they have a "huge influence… People want to be where they belong. That's not always in the city". Further, Sarah elaborates that the community "…shaped a very positive part of my identity – how to live with people…how to understand people…"

Numerous respondents noted that they are drawn to the strength of relationships in a rural community, for example, "…my spouse and I have grown into our "ruralness" over the past several years." As a survey respondent reflected, "We are finding that we are drawn to the type and strength of relationships that are possible in smaller communities." Further, many respondents from the surveys and interviews noted that multi-generations have the opportunity to connect and share in each other's worlds. The sense of belonging or membership, connection, and the interconnected nature of community emerge as important patterns in the data.

The sense of community theory provides a theoretical lens through which I can begin to analyze participants' responses to questions about their community perception, their intentions to stay, leave or return, and what "participation" and "engagement" mean to them in the context of their own community. Further, it illustrates a way to view the connections to community and the relationships which may draw young people to stay or return. These connections enhance our understanding of the factors (such as a sense of place and belonging) that youth say impact their engagement in the rural community. These factors also aid in understanding patterns of youth mobility and migration.

Social capital, or networks based on trust and reciprocity was evident in the survey and interview findings. This finding sheds light on the question: *In what ways might social networks between youth/community leaders or mentors impact youth engagement in the rural community, and their decisions to stay, leave, or return?* For example, many interview participants voiced a connection to their

community through their ties to their family and networks. Numerous responses indicated important networks within a faith community or extracurricular activities. Sarah also spoke about her involvement in church and connection to some of the women there as those who took a true interest in who she was, what she was reading, and what she was doing now. However, she also notes that a gap exists. In her words "there was a spirit of participation and inclusion that I didn't find there…" for example, she states that the expectation on her to perform music in the church was about contributing to the group and "was not about me". Several key stakeholders mentioned social connections as vital components to rural community life. Diana provides a clear example of these connections:

> I think that basically everybody knows your name. People get to know each other and you make social connections. That would be a big thing about staying in the area, and lots of opportunities too. So there's the social connections, but lots of opportunities for things like volunteer work and making a difference. It's sometimes easier in a small community to get involved in various causes and volunteering… Like there might be small towns that don't have that but…one of the factors I think makes it a healthy and strong community and place to be is the school sports programs.

This example illustrates the sense of energy that this community organizer brings to her community, as well as the inter-connected nature of rural community life and networks that include volunteering and "making a difference". Throughout the interviews participants describe aspects of their individual and collective identity and responsibility in relation to their community. This is consistent with the survey data that indicated that youth want to be engaged and involved. According to the survey data and interviews, volunteering and participating in community activities was considered a norm in the rural communities. This finding is consistent with Sousa's (2006) research that found that a feature of social capital evident in community life is the "creation and adherence to norms such as co-operation and protecting each other" and "…the expectation that contributions would be reciprocated by others giving their time and energy" (p.256). These norms, social connections, and a sense of reciprocity address one of my key research questions. The data help to explain the ways social networks between youth and community leaders or mentors impact youth engagement in their rural community, and their decisions to stay, leave, or return.

For example, the youth who expressed that they felt they were included and supported by an older generation described a sense of membership and belonging. They felt that the community "invested" in them and that they were always welcome to return to the rural community they called "home".

Volunteerism, and the ideas of bridging and bonding (Putnam, 2000) were evident in the findings. This finding contributes to an understanding of the research question about ways in which youth/community leaders or mentors describe their individual/collective identity or responsibility in relation to this community. Participants remarked on the importance of their various volunteer roles and how these roles lead to connections in other aspects of their lives. The connections between volunteer participation and social capital are evident. Volunteering strengthens a sense of community and social cohesion and, as Sousa's (2006) research demonstrated, this volunteer participation contributes to and helps sustain social capital. Volunteer roles as a key method of participating and engaging in community life were also clear in the interviews. These activities offered networks to link youth and adults in the community, and to surrounding rural communities.

Bridging and bonding are part of how social capital theory is explored, and are important in the rural context, too, but in very different ways. Bridging is demonstrated as building connections between generations, while bonds build solidarity between one rural area and the next, and between sectors to increase resiliency and strengthen various factors of rural life. However, while there is potential to connect, there is also the power to alienate or exclude. What is also notable in the interviews and survey responses are what participants articulate is missing. For example, several respondents mentioned a gap between how things are and how they wish them to be, as one survey member stated "… I live in the rural area in spite of lack of family, nearby work opportunities, or faith community. These are all parts of my life that I would like to have closer to my rural home." These missing pieces are also important to a deeper analysis of rural community development, and specifically, the role that social capital plays in building and accessing rural community resources and networks.

The element of engagement was evident in the surveys, and in the connection and a sense of belonging to a rural community that is often described in the interviews as "participation" in rural life. The interviews provide examples of how one decides to be involved, and in what ways. This data provided insight into the messages that youth receive about staying and participating in the daily life in their community. In this way, the data responded directly to the research question: *In what ways might social networks between youth/community leaders or mentors impact youth engagement in the rural community, and their decisions to stay, leave, or return?* Although participation was sometimes described in economic terms, such as finding local work or considering taking over the family farm, participation was also described in cultural terms. For example, survey and interview respondents mentioned the importance of Aboriginal history in the area or being part of a specific cultural or faith community. Participation was also described in the interviews and survey in social terms, most notably family history or family connections, and being involved in the social fabric of community life; and it included political factors such as engaging in global education projects connecting local and international issues, or being involved with local leadership. Sometimes these factors bridge across community lines. Elizabeth, one of the key stakeholder interview participants, is involved in two rural communities. In addition, she manages a ranch. She expressed her involvement it as "bridging" and explained it this way: "It's work related, but the work transcends being work because it is being of service to the community and the neighbouring community to the one I live in." Further Elizabeth describes, "A lot of the work I do – all of the work I do is – all of it, really – is in human services and providing preventative social services to the citizens that reside in municipal district – we provide services to families, youth, children and seniors."

When asked about some of the benefits and challenges of the rural lifestyle, Elizabeth spoke of parenting her own sons and how volunteering was her link to the rural community. She explained it this way:

> I think there are obvious life qualities about living in a rural area that require you to be based on the land, and then as sort of marrying into that situation to

find things that are a fit for your own interest level…we have a career program for youth that I hold the contract for, but I am not an example of that for you. I was in university, but circumstances led to me being in rural Alberta.

This link between participation and belonging in the rural community runs through the surveys, and interviews. It is evident from the study findings that a sense of belonging needs to be built, and more opportunities created for youth and adults to participate and engage. The findings also suggest that a deeper understanding of rural youth migration might be gained by providing a focused forum for youth and adults to communicate with each other. Dialogue offers this opportunity.

The interest in strengthening rural communities and creating a sense of community suggests that there is a space in rural communities for dialogue that can enhance engagement and build trust between youth and adults. The process of dialogue outlined in my theoretical and conceptual chapters provides a way to engage with youth and adults across generations, connect participants, and learn more about the key elements that I described in this chapter. Dialogue offers a method to understand elements of attachment and identity, including a sense of belonging and membership that are essential parts of a sense of community. Further, dialogue provides a method for reciprocal communication between generations. This shared process sets the stage to explore some of the tensions that exist as young people make decisions, and some of the factors that impact youth engagement, as well as migration and mobility. Dialogue also includes the context in which the communication occurs, adding an important element to understanding the diversity and complexities of rural experiences and rural communities.

Conscientization, a key element of my conceptual lens, is helpful to explore the interview data and how participants are aware of their knowledge about their rural community. They understand many of the factors that impact rural youth migration and they have a point of view about what supports or limits engagement. There is a consciousness about their community, and they are willing to move this awareness into action. Participants noted moments of realization and turning points in their lives. These findings illuminate the research sub-question: *How are the factors that may influence a younger generation of rural youth staying, leaving, or returning to*

their community identified by youth and adults/community leaders? Notably, youth and adult participants acknowledged the importance of parental influences, and the critical roles of educators.

One interview respondent provided the example that teachers could encourage and facilitate a sense of belonging and learning opportunities by being models and demonstrating appropriate social behaviour including willingness to question how power manifests in schools, from student to student, and teacher to teacher. This example demonstrates conscientization and a shift in a way of understanding the world. The individual elaborated on this response to explain that there is power and agency at play in a rural community and choices to be made – escape, coping, and deciding if these were healthy responses. She questioned whether or not teachers understand the importance of these dynamics and the decisions that rural youth encounter. Educators might have a more direct role in facilitating this type of learning and exploring these issues through dialogue. Several stakeholders offered examples of profound learning and conscientization. Some examples demonstrated democratic processes through civic engagement.

Context, the seventh element in my conceptual lens, is important in rural communities. Findings from the data provide rich evidence that context matters. Rural youth seemed acutely aware of their rural identity and their relationship to a place. Although people and relationships matter, some were clear that they would return because of their attachment to the place - the rural landscape, history and environment matter to them more than those who live there. I conclude from the findings that both people and place are essential elements in the rural context. As I described in my theoretical chapters, dialogue is more than a conversation, it is attentive to context. I will keep the element of context in mind as I examine the findings from the dialogues.

The findings from the survey and interview data have been organized into key concepts and related back to my research sub-questions and the seven elements of my conceptual framework. Rural identity and attachment emerged as additional

elements to explore. In the second part of this chapter I reflect on the process of setting up the dialogues that I facilitated in Kitscoty, Alberta, highlighting the important elements of these dialogues. In the following chapter I describe the results from the two community dialogues.

Reflections on Preparing for the Intergenerational Dialogues

When I began this study I did not intend to write a chapter on the experience of being immersed as an outsider in a rural community. I consider myself an insider in a rural context, but not in the specific community where my dialogues were conducted, and I did not have a formal connection to this particular group of participants. Although I had insights into rural community life, I was not a true insider. That said, while I now live in an urban setting, during the most challenging times in the research process, I found myself drawing on my rural experiences and background to connect with community members. Perhaps not surprisingly, these familiar patterns helped build trust and rapport by communicating with rural community members in an authentic and credible way. Rural is important. I care about this work. Do qualitative researchers examining rural community issues need to be a part of the rural population they are studying? Do they need to be presently living there, or have a rural background? What I learned through the process of facilitating the rural dialogues is an outcome of my research. Now I explore some of the questions about membership posed by scholars and talk about insider/outsider dynamics as they relate to this study.

Duality of Research

There is a duality to the role of qualitative researcher. While closely examining the lives of others and learning about their experiences, I simultaneously weigh and account for my own assumptions. Mykut and Morehouse (1994) speak about the perspective of the qualitative researcher as "paradoxical", as we try to be aware of how our own biases and preconceived ideas impact our work (p.123). In this process I considered my own understanding of the phenomenon, holding it up against the literature about the role of the qualitative researcher, and digging into the research questions and data to explore the broader questions of membership and belonging in

a rural community. While my experience and perspective add value to the research process, participants' own words about being part of the community are critical for a broader understanding of my research questions.

The exploration of the researcher's role and membership is important. The researcher is in a position of power and plays an intimate role in observation, data collection, and analysis. There is immense power in what is seen, and what remains unseen; what is included, and what is left out. It is crucial to gather data with an awareness of our own assumptions while maintaining openness about the research questions. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) explore these positions and point us to Asselin (2003) who asserts that while the researcher might be part of the culture under study, they might not be part of the subculture. The subtleties and differences are important to understand the phenomena and the researcher's power. To what extent then is it vital to identify the researcher's position in relation to the phenomena in the research study? Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest that researchers are increasingly talking about their membership identity. Further, there is greater attention to the researcher's context, which Angrosino (2005) describes as gender, class, and ethnicity. In this study, my farm background and experience living, studying, volunteering, and working in rural communities in Canada as well as other countries, informs my general understanding of the rural phenomena being studied. However, it also increases the necessity to be attentive to my own biases and points to the need to challenge my own assumptions.

A sense of my own identity, place and history motivated me and shaped the type of project I designed, but my assumptions, values, and bias require adequate analysis. For this reason I am examining my position as a researcher with insight into rural community life. Preston (2009), explains that our physical and physiological beings are shaped by our landscapes, including the "way people talk, argue, and hold their values as residents of a particular regional culture and particular geographical locality" (p.176), and further, the "particular spaces and places in which we do our thinking contribute to the knowledge we create" (Preston, 2003, p.74). In the next section, I discuss the role of the researcher, and how this status impacted the process of setting up the dialogues.

Insider/Outsider

The concept of a researcher as insider, outsider or somewhere in between has been discussed across disciplines. Breen (2007) provides insight and a comprehensive review of how researchers from fields as diverse as anthropology, education, nursing, and psychology approach qualitative methodologies. She notes that when a researcher studies a group, community, or culture to which they belong, they often begin the research process as an insider (see also Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002; Harklau and Norwood, 2005; Hewitt-Taylor, 2002; Kanuha, 2000). Current scholarship stresses that a researcher can be in between the roles. They can identify and reflect on bias, and gain insight through observation and experience (Breen, 2007; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). For example, Breen (2007) argues that "…the insider/outsider dichotomy is simplistic, and the distinction is unlikely to adequately capture the role of all researchers. Instead, the role of the researcher is better conceptualized on a continuum, rather than as an either/or dichotomy" (p.163). A role as neither an insider-researcher nor outsider-researcher then allows the researcher to benefit from the advantages and minimize the potential barriers of one status or another.

The place in between, or along a continuum, as Breen (2007) suggests, is the place where I ultimately feel I belong. For example, through these initial challenges I considered the strengths and limitations of conducting qualitative research as an outsider in this particular community, and weighed it against the relative merit of conducting the same research study in my home community with a status closer to an insider. It would have been a very different research study in the hometown in which I grew up. On one hand I would have the networks and contacts gained from years of volunteer work, sports, music, family connections and Mennonite roots. On the other hand, being known in the community may have created some resistance to be involved in a research study with someone "known" – an insider, with a familiar family name. Further, though I return often to the family farm, ultimately, I chose to leave the community. Issues of trust, confidentiality, and perhaps a perceived pressure to volunteer for my research study may have impacted participation, either increasing or decreasing the numbers of participants. Further, participants may have

perceived similarities or differences that caused them to leave out parts of their experience, with an assumption that I already understood.

The nuanced position between these dichotomous points of insider/outsider that Dwyer and Buckle (2009) call the "space between" perhaps best describes my status as a researcher. I grew up on a farm and was raised in a rural community, but I am now at home in an urban center. My commitment to rural community development and ties to rural communities are demonstrated through membership in community supported agriculture (CSA), as well as land ownership, and more nuanced notions of family history and rural identity. How then, does this affect my role as a researcher and the research process? In the next section I discuss how I chose the community of Kitscoty, Alberta, in Canada, why and how I revised my timeline, and what variables I considered as I made those decisions.

Site Selection for Intergenerational Dialogue

In my methods chapter I described the process of community selection. In this section I discuss why this process, the ultimate selection of Kitscoty, Alberta as a rural research site was an important step. This selection and my experiences within this community frame my discussion about membership roles, insider and outsider status, and how I conducted the qualitative research. The results from my survey with rural youth who have left rural communities provided a foundation for understanding what it means to live in a rural community. Family history, church, schools, and older community members who took an interest in the younger generation were all mentioned by the survey respondents as being cornerstones of rural community life.

Initial Contact in Kitscoty

As I mentioned previously, I selected the community of Kitscoty for the intergenerational dialogue and interviews with youth and adults who participated in the dialogue. One of my first contacts was with the Chamber of Commerce, who recommended that I speak with the local youth worker for the Kitscoty and Wainright region as an initial contact person. Another key contact currently living and teaching in Kitscoty also suggested that I consider Marwayne, Paradise Valley, Dewberry, or

Elk Point as rural villages in the area. She mentioned these surrounding communities because of their school programs, and the strong commitment of high school educators, as well as networks between communities, such as summer youth programs, and sports. My research interviews included participants from a number of surrounding communities. Kitscoty was notable in my initial exploration of sites for the dialogues. It is a rural Alberta community with a rich history of farming, a strong volunteer sector and recreational spirit, and it celebrates local community achievements, such as building recreational walking trails.

As I discussed, through a process of internet research and telephone conversations with the Chamber of Commerce, I prepared a list of key contacts who worked with youth and who were embarking on a partnership with youth and adults/seniors. I provided a profile of the community to my committee members. Through the key contact people I aimed to identify 3-4 youth, and 3-4 adults, who were willing to be interviewed and be paired together for the intergenerational dialogue. The first step was to conduct an initial interview with each of the youth, and each of the adults, based on my interview protocol and informed by responses from the survey data. The next step was to meet with the youth and adults together to explain the framework for the dialogue. I would provide a set of introductory questions to use as an entry point and a tape recorder for the pair to use when they interviewed each other. In my initial design, these youth and adults would then be given the parameters of the dialogue and asked to interview *each other* 2-3 times during a set period of time, with sample questions provided at various intervals (for example, over four months from February-May, 2010). During this time I planned to check in and monitor their interactions. Finally, the pairs (6-8 people) would be invited to come together for a collective dialogue and process of reflection. I planned to facilitate the discussion by bringing out issues and asking questions about key themes that emerged in the dialogues. Questions to prompt their discussion might also be informed through interviews that I planned to conduct in additional rural communities.

My research plan was my "ideal" scenario. In the activities section below I describe the "real" process and some of the challenges along the way. Throughout

this process I asked the question, "What would change if I was an insider in this community?" I also consider, "How does this research compare or contrast with a study I might conduct in my home rural community, in which I am on the cusp of the insider/outsider polemic?" These questions, concerning membership, validity, and specifically whether a qualitative researcher should be a member of their study population, are reflected in the work of Dwyer and Buckle (2009). This literature will provide a lens through which I will discuss the "lived experience" of research involving a population with which I share similarities and differences.

Learning and Action in Context – Ideal meets Real

I was relieved to read (alas, in hindsight) the experiences of other researchers who faced challenges. Longden (2005) asks, "Was the research process as smooth, logical and as organized" as the final text might imply, and does it account for the research process, "…all the failed starts, compromises in research design because of external and internal factors, and serendipitous occurrences that in retrospect saved the research design from certain failure." (p.107). I ponder these questions as I reflect on how the research process unfolded. Initially I visited the community of Kitscoty after writing a letter to the Mayor and speaking with several contacts I found on the community website. I chose to follow an informal protocol, informing the local municipality that I was interested in coming to the community for research. Although I tried to set up an in-person meeting with the mayor or other community leaders to discuss my interest in Kitscoty, I did not receive a response. I spoke with members from the county office and "Village of Kitscoty" and I was connected with a young woman - the Youth Resiliency worker. As I discuss later, this contact person changed during the course of my project. The importance of family connections and networks in rural communities became increasingly evident to me when one of my aunts from a rural Alberta community in the same school district as Kitscoty told me that the principals and guidance counselor at the local schools had particularly good reputations within the school system for their commitment to supporting local students, and I should start by contacting them. Through in-person visits to the community and telephone calls, I began connecting with the high school guidance counselor, who then connected me with the Safe and Caring Committee.

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Initially I was advised that posters in prominent location in town, such as the post office, bulletin boards, and restaurant boards, and the local newsletter were the best method to invite participation and to advertise my intention of facilitating a dialogue with youth and adults. I took the new Youth Resiliency worker (the one I met initially took another position in Lloydminster) and a youth worker from another rural community for lunch and discussed dates with them. They also agreed to help me connect with rural youth over age 18 for my sample. It is significant that the first dates that we considered were in July, notably summer and key farming time. Although the youth resiliency worker and my initial contacts in the community planned to attend, I did not receive other calls or email inquiries about my postings. I arranged with the local seniors' center to host the dialogues in their central location in town, and specifically invited the senior coordinator and put up postings in the senior center. Despite the planning, and advertising, this first attempt at hosting the dialogues was not a success. The youth resiliency worker contacted me to let me know that she had not been able to confirm youth from her contacts to participate, and she was also not able to attend. I asked my local contacts if they thought that participants might just come without confirming, and they speculated that was a possibility.

Reflections of the Selection and Engagement Process

Through my past experiences living and working in rural communities, I have learned the importance of having allies and key contacts or informants to connect with local youth and adults. In several rural communities in Alberta I had potential contacts through local teachers or youth workers. I anticipated that building relationships with these initial contact people would be an asset to help me build trust as I entered the community and as I set up interviews and prepared for the focus group dialogues. These initial relationships were important because the research process takes time and planning, and the participants are volunteers. Seale (2005) speaks about these challenges in gaining trust and the time it takes to set up interviews. This is an important process, and although it can be very discouraging, these are important steps (with ethical considerations) in terms of ensuring that

potential research participants have a clear understanding of the research study and know that their participation is voluntary.

What I had not anticipated, and a detail that proved challenging, was the gap between the ideal initial contacts and feedback I received, and the ongoing steps it took to complete the study. For example, while I had a positive response from the receptionist at the Chamber of Commerce, I did not hear directly from the mayor. Seale (2005) refers to having realistic expectations of timelines and volunteer participation and working through setbacks at least 3 times before considering an alternate plan. While I had some very fruitful conversations by telephone with the first youth resilience worker I contacted, she left for a position in Lloydminster (a larger center 20 minutes away) and I began to communicate with the young women who filled her position. This change in staff, though challenging in the beginning stages of my research, is also reflective of the very issue I am investigating in this thesis. As young people move for positions in larger centers they leave behind important roles within the rural community, and in this example, a new employee is hired to replace them. In a field such as youth work, momentum is lost and the young people in the community, as well as youth resiliency workers from surrounding rural communities, must then build relationships with someone new. It takes time and trust to build these relationships. In this case it was expressed to me that the new youth resiliency worker was from the community and knew the dynamics very well. These changes in roles are not unfamiliar to the work world, and yet they can add extra months to the study as a researcher gains new ground and establishes trust with a new community member.

Learning from Field Notes

My initial research plan was to host two research dialogues with 10 participants in spring, 2010. With a change in one of my key contacts, I revised my plan and requested the support of the new youth resiliency worker to help me to identify young people in the community, aged 18-30, who might be willing to participate in the dialogues and an in-depth interview. After several weeks it became clear to me that this was going to be a more challenging process than I had anticipated. The setback prompted me to revise my initial plan and seek input from the potential respondents

about timing and potential barriers to participation. I scheduled an in-person meeting with the youth worker and her counter-part from a nearby community. Over lunch at the local Chinese-Western restaurant, I talked with them about my plan to facilitate a dialogue between 5 youth and 5 adults, proposed a timeline, and asked for their perspective on what might work. Both agreed that the local newsletters were "read by everyone" and that the post-office and local bulletin boards would be good places to put up posters. The next set of challenges also provided a pathway into the community as I searched for a place to copy my posters with revised dates.

At this stage of my recruitment, I noticed that it was not possible to purchase colored paper in town, and that the library had the only public internet access, other than a school computer lab. These may seem to be minor details, but a simple thing like buying office supplies at a local store impacts who is able to conduct business locally. It emphasizes the possibilities that can be present within the rural community rather than travel to the nearest larger community to access paper and internet. As the local library is located in the school, access to the internet is limited to school hours. Although these were not noted as deficits by community members, it became clearer why residents might drive twenty minutes to the nearest Staples for office supplies. In addition, internet connection was not working at the local library, and I was met with a response similar to "that's just the way it is" when I inquired. However, the elementary school receptionist copied my posters without charge and when I explained the study she quickly noted that the local teachers and principals would be interested and gave me their contact information.

Through this initial process of advertising and recruiting I learned that my vehicle was visible as a "newcomer" in the community, and there was a curiosity about what I was doing there. A local antique store owner watched closely as I went into the grocery store and local craft store. He noticed that I had left my car lights on and later said he would have switched them off for me if I had not returned. My sense was that my visibility in the community was increasing and that prominent members of the "Main Street" or community life might mention their interactions with me to others. Clive (2005) describes this as a snowball effect where local community members connect the researcher with other potential participants. I was

hoping that this effect might increase the local understanding of my study, attest to my credibility, and encourage participation from a wider sector of the community. In these interactions it became clearer to me that there was not a lack of interest in the research issue, but rather, community members needed more time to get to know me and my interest in the community. I was gaining confidence and felt braver asking more questions and speaking about my research project. A quick reference to my interest in the rural community and my work seemed to put local community members at ease. I found myself changing my tone and language in a subtle way, but one I noted as familiar to me. These insights into rural dynamics proved to be valuable. At the local "Wheatie" coffee shop for example, I sat with the local newsletter open on my table, and several people stopped to exchange remarks. I started to mention that I initially heard about Kitscoty because they are known for their baseball diamonds, and that my grandfather's farm was an hour away. Those details alone seemed to help me to gain some trust and smoothed the way for further conversation about the rural area.

Emerging Challenges from Constructing the Dialogues

With my posters at the local Senior Centre, town boards, and cafes, I followed with a posting in the local newsletter. I began telephoning service clubs, teachers, community groups, and churches to explain the project and recruit potential participants. I booked the local senior's Centre at the recommendation of the youth worker and contact at the local school. However, ten days before my proposed first dialogue evening, I only had two participants confirmed. My postings contained my contact information and asked for an RSVP – with a promise of food and drinks, but I wondered if folks might just "show up" without confirming. With all the fear of a researcher embarking on her first community-based dialogue, I worked my way through the community directory again calling potential participants and asking them for recommendations of youth and adults who might contribute their perspectives to this study. Despite calls to all of the local organizations, I did not receive a single email or telephone call in return. These telephone calls proved beneficial; however, as they led to some longer conversations with key stakeholders about the research questions, but no additional participants were recruited for the dialogues. I chose to

drive out to the community on the scheduled evening. By this point I realized that summer, harvest time, and holidays may all have had some impact on participation. However, I wanted to be there even if only 2 participants came. That same day I received a cancellation. My hope was that I could overcome discouragement and analyze this experience to ask "why" it was not successful, as part of the research process.

I went to Kitscoty for the first dialogue date, prepared the meeting hall, and waited. And I waited. After half an hour it was clear that no one was coming. Although this was a setback for my research methodology and timeline, there were also lessons that I knew I would be writing about later. These relate to the energy, time, and commitment required for community organizing. What was needed was a longer-term vision and time to build relationships and the trust to work together with community members who did not know me or my background, as an individual or as a researcher. Although no participants came that evening, I went through the paces of setting up the equipment, preparing all of my resources for the dialogue, and bringing coffee and snacks. The lack of research participants in my first efforts illustrates the importance of building relationships with community members through in-person conversations and attendance at meetings and local events, and the importance of formally or informally confirming their attendance. Although the experience of uncertainty about numbers of participants was disheartening, I decided to think of it as a "rehearsal" and, like a drama production, go through the steps of preparing for the dialogues to be clear about how I would facilitate them when I had the participants.

This experience of the empty hall, coffee brewing and no participants twenty minutes after official starting time was the low point of the research journey. I questioned my outsider position as researcher in Kitscoty and wondered how a different rural community might have responded to my study. How different the experience might have been had I selected a rural community in which I had done previous community development as part of my work with an international education exchange. I would have greater insights. In those rural communities I already had key contacts who were informal leaders within the community, families who had

hosted young people, and work placement supervisors who had worked with exchange student volunteers. This research would have been a different project if I had conducted it in my own rural community where I may always be received as an insider, even though I have left. At this stage I began to consider a "Plan B", potentially choosing other rural communities in which I had some initial contacts and the reputation of my previous work to draw on if needed. Clearly, this would change the study. Further, I selected Kitscoty as a community based on my research questions and responses to initial data collection. However, was it possible, or practical to try to keep working to build rapport with local community members if they did not have the time or interest in my study? Beginning from the assumption that there was interest, based on conversations with helpful community members who seemed supportive and interested but not ready to commit to a dialogue, I forged ahead. The phase of building trust and rapport with potential participants was going to take longer than I had planned. It took courage and what I began to call "emotional fortitude" to stay confident in the process and keep talking with people, asking questions, and explaining my interest in the rural community.

My doubts about how to engage rural community members in my study lingered. If I could not recruit participants, the research would consist of my survey and interviews, but without the final phase of dialogues with youth and adults. How could I enter this community? It was time to focus energy on building relationships and asking why my plan did not work the first time. My aunt, a school counselor and teacher in Manville, Alberta, about an hour away from Kitscoty, confirmed the excellent reputation of the local schools and principals. She postulated that the schools were a large factor in young families' choice to stay in the rural community. She provided several names of educators and suggested that they would be great contacts for my work. At this critical point I had a reference and although I was still "cold calling," one kind, helpful contact agreed to an interview, and these contacts began to snowball. I began to build a network through referrals of people who shared similar characteristics, and through personal recommendations. As Clive (2005) explains, this snowball approach to building a network of potential participants is especially useful when local community members can speak to others about the

legitimacy of the researcher, and connect with people who may not otherwise participate.

As I began to gain some ground in recruiting and retaining participants for my study, I took field notes about the experience. My "local girl" status was a bonus, and I slipped back into something that I began to think of as rural language, relating to local events I had seen posted. I commented on the changing seasons and how they impacted who was around and what was happening in the community. I felt more comfortable in the town, and the 'local' culture. I wrote notes on a napkin in a truck stop on my way back into the city late one night, and thought about ways in which I would like to be approached if a researcher wanted me to participate in a dialogue or interview. There was a need to talk more with potential participants about how they were involved in the community and find ways to connect through these conversations.

By rescheduling the dialogues for fall, 2010, I was able to take part in a Safe and Caring Communities meeting, and talk about my research. Here I became involved in community members' activities – observing and participating through my attendance, but not fully affiliated during the course of the research. Alder and Alder (1987) discuss this approach as being more than a peripheral member, and becoming active "without fully committing to members' values or goals" but not a complete member of the community. In addition to affording time to talk about my work and my need for participants, this meeting provided critical insight into community life, civic participation, and decision-making. The coordinator mentioned that the meetings follow an agenda and never last more than an hour, to respect the time of the volunteers. They planned a winter festival, Tuesday night drop-in recreation in the high school gymnasium including new fitness classes like Zumba recreational dance, and the details of the community volunteer sign-up night. After the meeting, several people came up to me to volunteer for my study. With those first expressions of interest and support I had the momentum I needed to move forward.

At this point I wondered how many research projects are adversely affected by their perceived "outsider" status and how many projects are abandoned or

reconsidered when researchers are faced with barriers such as limited participation or challenges when approaching community members or local organizations. Since writing this chapter, I have learned that the answer to that question may be "lots, maybe most." As Seale (2005) concedes, gaining access and building trust is a time consuming process. With a list of potential volunteers in hand, I decided to try to recruit the others I needed, and then consult all of them about potential times for the dialogues. I had the seed I needed to gain momentum, and at the suggestion of a local contact, I registered for a table at the local Volunteer Sign up night. At this stage I was building trust, but I was still not an insider. In a sense I was moving to acceptance as part of some important events in rural community life. What was notable to me was my own sense of obligation to be involved and engaged. Drawing on my background as part of a rural community where it was important to demonstrate investment, I set about building rapport by being involved in an event. In this way I confirmed my understanding of membership and worthiness of belonging. Though there was still tension inherent in my position as a researcher who was not a true insider but had insight into rural community life, I was gaining trust.

Learning through Language, Observation, and Participation

Arriving early at the volunteer night, I chose a table and started to pitch in, setting up the community hall for the evening. The local community hall is new and a beautiful facility that hosts banquets, dinner theatre, dances and local meetings. What I learned throughout this night was valuable to me as I proceeded with my research. Through participation in the volunteer night, I was told about ways that local residents could participate and engage with community life. The crowds coming through the doors included young people grabbing free hotdogs and quickly signing up for minor hockey league. There were also seniors, educators, youth workers, and young families with school-aged children and infants. The booths included a range of options from Minor Hockey League (wildly popular) to 4-H, the local library, civic projects, and a bereavement society. I set up a booth for my project and interacted with visitors. I noticed that the language and the way that community members spoke about their rural community was positive and there was passion and energy to

support these local initiatives. Though many people showed passing interest in my research, it was clear to me that I would have to be bolder in my approach and ask for names or recommendations of people who might contribute to the dialogues, especially younger participants. A retired teacher who was recommended to me by numerous community contacts declined to participate, which took the wind out of my proverbial sails. I tried to ask why and reassure her with explanations of the process, and entice her with affirmation that her perspective would be a valued asset to the study, but ultimately the choice not to participate was hers. I do not have a clear sense why she chose not to participate. Some possibilities might include her busy volunteering schedule, which includes an annual part in the high school drama production, lack of transportation, or a hesitation to be involved in a research process with someone she does not know. Meanwhile, another community member began to point out young people who had stayed in the area. Many of these contacts were young women with young families who are active in the community. By the end of this evening I had a list of names and contact numbers. I also had sufficient initial face-to-face contact with potential participants to feel confident that, with a lot of work to build these relationships, the dialogues would be completed. These participants would contribute phenomenal perspectives and ideas about their lives and their rural community in the process.

Over the next weeks, the dialogues finally came to fruition. In the following chapter on dialogue I discuss the results. Two examples come to mind to explore the importance of community access and of talking with older and younger community members for this research. During the data collection phase when I was setting up the community dialogues I visited a sheep farm and dairy about 5 minute drive from Kitscoty. This impromptu field trip added not only local cheese and chorizo sausage to my itinerary, but also a vital glimpse into the way that the local economy is diversifying, and the "lived experience" of one of the participants. She and her 2 year old son were taking care of the farm store for the evening while her brother and sister-in-law worked on the farm. From the farm I went back into Kitscoty, and while I set up for the focus group a local community member suggested that I go to the local hockey rink for dinner. There I observed 3 generations helping to prepare the

young players for practice. What was notable to me was that in many cases, grandparents, parents and siblings had come to watch. There were 43 vehicles in the parking lot and side streets. That was where the community members appeared to be focused that evening.

As I prepared for the second intergenerational dialogue a senior farmer, aged 76, came in to visit me at the seniors' Centre. He had seen the lights on at the Senior Centre when I went to get milk from the corner store, and came in to lock the door and talk with me. It was the last harvest day for him and his sons on his land that has been in the family for 100 years. He told me about working with his sons as they take over the farm, with only asthma holding him back from driving truck, combine, or tractor more often. He considered participating in the focus group, but was too tired from a long day of work. For more than half an hour he stood talking with me and sharing his experiences. Though he did not participate in the dialogues, he has invited me for coffee when I am back in the community. His insight provides important background for this work, and the time he took to speak with me attests to the importance of one-to-one connections and building relationships within the community.

The challenges in setting up the dialogues in Kitscoty confirmed for me that my role as a researcher permeates all aspects of the research process. It is fundamental to the completion of this research study. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) articulated it this way:

> As qualitative researchers, we are not separate from the study… [I]nstead, we are firmly in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. The stories of participants are immediate and real to us; individual voices are not lost in a pool of numbers. We carry these individuals with us as we work with the transcripts. The words, representing experiences, are clear and lasting. We cannot retreat to a distant "researcher" role. Just as our personhood affects the analysis, so too, the analysis affects our personhood. With this circle of impact is the space between (p.61).

Truly the voices of the participants are dynamic and are coming fully into the present as I am working with the data from the interview transcripts. My intention is to be attentive to the process, reflect upon and challenge my own bias and assumptions, and be vigilant with the data analysis. By asking the participants to validate or

expand on their own interpretations of the data, I invite them to be part of a process that is complex and messy while it reflects what it means to be human, and to part of a dynamic rural community.

Finding My Place in Rural Community Research: The Space Between

The "space between" that Dwyer and Buckle (2009) postulate, is where I fit. The push and pull reflected in the previous quotations illustrate the reality that inhabiting this place between is not always comfortable, but a place of discomfort may be the best possible ground for challenging assumptions and learning with participants. By straddling insider/outsider status building rapport took time and patience, but I argue that it would not have happened, or would have been a much longer process without a reference point to gain access into the rural community life. The hockey rink, antique store, schools, community events, and the local coffee shop are a few examples of spaces and places where connections were made, step by step. This insider/outsider status, though unsettling and uncomfortable at times, also provides a foundation for understanding local dynamics or what makes a community a welcoming place, interactions between generations, and why young people might stay or return. As a young person growing up in a rural area I witnessed the efforts that newcomers made to 'fit in' to the local community, and the assumption that if you were not born there, you were always on the fringes. Are the same dynamics true in Kitscoty, or other rural communities? It is my goal to work in partnerships with rural community members and educators to understand these dynamics and ask questions about what makes a rural community a welcoming place. The initial discomfort as a researcher in an unknown community may also spark questions of how a newcomer might integrate, and it may help to answer questions about why young people may or may not feel welcome to stay or return.

In Kitscoty, the walking and biking paths, built by local residents, were emphasized as important to the community. They suggested that conversations and connections happen between community members along these physical structures, and that the participation of community members is evident on the work days when the paths were being built. This example serves as an analogy for my experience as a

researcher in Kitscoty. While I was in the community I walked on these paths and took in the beauty of a lake full of snow geese in early autumn. The importance of the connections between community members and their natural surroundings was suddenly visceral for me as I breathed in the cool fall air and reveled in the beauty of the birds. This walk also served to connect me to community members. Although I did not realize it at the time, residents who talked with me about the trails connected with me as someone with a shared experience – one who appreciates the natural beauty of this rural community and understood the importance of the community efforts.

Physical space and environment are important dimensions in understanding rural community life (Preston, 2009). While this position emphasizes physical space and environment, there are also important aspects of the social fabric of a community. Gender, class, race, and age shape the knowledge shared by the participants. I am interested in taking up Preston's (2009) point that our ethics are shaped by our surroundings, and that our material structures are shaped by our values. Preston (2009) provides a foundation for this discussion as he asks about the dominant structures in our lives and how easily we might transform them, in what ways they connect or disconnect us from others, and further, how do we contribute to place, and how does place contribute to our lives? In another example cited often by participants in the dialogues and interviews, the school playground and community hall are two symbolic structures within the community.

According to the participants, after community-wide fundraising efforts supported the purchase of playground materials, the playground was built over one weekend, by community members of all ages who volunteered for the project. They had been told that the effort usually takes at least a few weeks. There was pride and a community narrative built around this project. It is a success story. Participants also noted that children take care of the new equipment because they have had a part in fundraising and the physical aspects of building the structure. Local children in the Kitscoty area have also built birdhouses, and volunteers were involved in building the walking trails. These designs and structures are part of the community, and are an entry point for speaking about what the community values, and how and why people

participate. In the interviews with survey respondents, an example from Adam illustrates this point:

> When my mom started Communities in Bloom she wanted her flowers on Main Street. And everyone she talked to said that was a horrible idea. They'll just get vandalized. So she decided to go ahead anyway and she got 100 pots of flowers on Main Street. And the first night, like, 70 were vandalized. So she just re-potted them and put them out. And the next night it was, like, 40 were vandalized. And she kept potting and re-potting. She went through, like, 100s of flowers. Seriously. And eventually, like, they got tired [laughs] so now they leave them alone.

Adam also describes how they kept fixing them and putting them back up, and eventually put up a fake video camera to deter the vandals:

> But, like, every time you try to do something you have to, like, deal with vandalism…There's one time, again through my mother and through a friend of hers, I got together with a couple of other kids my age – and my brother – and we took pictures of places in town that were like [needing attention] like by the road where you couldn't see around the corner, roads that weren't being repaired, and we presented it to the town council. And it was very well received. Every single one of the things we pointed out was repaired. So in terms of that, that was really good.

These examples illustrate how rural communities thrive when residents are engaged in a wide range of activities that address a broad scope of rural community issues. This is what Marquart-Pyatt and Petrzelka (2008) refer to as issues-based involvement and ways that community members choose to engage in rural communities. Through these reflections I learned the importance of taking the time to plan and build relationships. Connections with rural community members happen in local spaces like the coffee shop, hockey rink, and local events such as the volunteer sign up night. These early reflections also had an impact on the dialogues because I asked questions about the places and activities in the community that were important to participants, and I took more time before, during, or after the dialogue to engage with the participants. These experiences also guided the questions I asked. For example, I asked for participants' reflections on what might make an outsider feel like they belonged in Kitscoty. Not surprisingly, they all mentioned participation as the key to belonging and being part of community life. In the following chapter I

explore these ideas further as they relate to democratic process and civic engagement. These examples are significant to me as a researcher. They were shared with me despite of, or because of, my insider/outsider role as a researcher. I can relate these examples back to my home community and think of similarities and differences, but I intend to analyze them with open eyes in response to my research questions.

Summary

In this chapter I shared some of the challenges I faced early in the research process, specifically with participant recruitment for my research dialogues. Ultimately I am both an insider and outsider as a researcher working within a rural community that is not my home, and yet I carry with me a rural history and identity. From this perspective, I am uniquely positioned to contribute new research to the field. This contributes to a broader range of understanding the experience, and emphasizes the complexity and ambiguity of human experiences with attention to both similarities and differences.

I discussed some of the gaps between the real and the ideal I had imagined in the research proposal. I relayed some very real challenges in gaining momentum in the community and confirming participants for my research dialogues. I provided an overview of community selection, recruitment efforts, and how I gathered my initial contacts. I provided examples from the survey and interview data that deepen my understanding of gaining access to a rural community, and what makes a rural community a welcoming place. Finally, I position this experience in the literature. I explore how this learning contributes new literature to the field of community development, and examine the insider/outsider status of the researcher in more detail.

By exploring the supports and barriers during the research process, I add a nuanced perspective to the question, should qualitative researchers examining rural community issues be part of the population they are studying? Insider/outsider status has limits, risks, and possibilities. My research questions were ultimately suited to a rural population that was receptive to my insider status as a researcher with rural roots, while my outsider status provides perspective that allows for a depth of

analysis in a rural community different from my own.   In the next chapter I explore

the data from the intergenerational dialogues in detail.

Chapter 6 – Intergenerational Dialogues

In this chapter I discuss key findings from the dialogues, and analyze the learning that occurred from the dialogical process. Previously I highlighted results from the survey and in-depth interviews. These findings focused on individual reactions and experiences with out-migration and rural identity. The key findings from the survey and interviews also suggested that many participants wanted to find ways to be engaged in their rural communities. The findings also indicate that participants have a sense of community and collective rural identity that could be strengthened through dialogue. This chapter focuses on the intergenerational dialogues, which explored the conceptual elements of engagement and collective sense of community in greater depth. First, I review the key theoretical elements of dialogue. Then, I highlight important results from the dialogues that I organized in the rural community and I discuss some of the themes and tensions that are explored in the dialogues. I use the seven elements of the conceptual framework as the lens to analyze both the dialogue process and the collected information. My intention is to relate the content of the dialogues back to the seven elements of my conceptual framework including a consideration in how these might be more deeply understood with attention to the seventh element, the rural context. To conclude, I examine how these findings respond to my research question and how they might be explored further through the dialogical process.

Exploring the Findings through the Dialogue Process

The practice and process of dialogue serves to build trust between participants is an active process of co-creating knowledge with rural community members. I organized the dialogues on two evenings, three weeks apart, to build in time for personal reflection for me and the participants between the dialogues. In the dialogues, younger community members and older community members from various backgrounds interviewed each other and responded to guiding questions in a conversation that was reciprocal between members. Sometimes the dialogue participants were in pairs, and sometimes in groups of 3. Although I provided guiding questions, the participants were encouraged to ask their own questions and

steer the dialogue content. I organized the dialogues this way to encourage a process that equalizes power and participation and encourages all voices to be heard. I provided guiding questions but encouraged participants to move in a direction that highlighted their own insights and concerns about their community. In this section I outline the key findings from the dialogue data, beginning from the premise that dialogue is an on-going balance of asking questions and responding.

Vella's (2004) application of dialogue that I highlighted in the theoretical chapter moves through a cycle that constructs a process of inductive work, input, integration, and implementation. Dialogue includes the three key elements of 1) participation and engagement, 2) reciprocal communication and 3) context. As demonstrated by the dialogues that I facilitated in Kitscoty, the dialogue process involves people in a process that encourages full participation, and it is attentive to place. I built from these three key elements to develop a dialogue approach which involves process-focused learning, rather than specific outcomes. I provided guiding questions rather than the content, recognizing that participants and the facilitator are learners (Vella, 2004) learning from and within their specific context or environment. The focus then shifts to learning through discussion in a positive space that encourages learning from each other and challenging assumptions. For instance, I observed that participants did not back down when the outcome was uncertain, but continued to question, explain, and explore. We began in small groups of 2 or 3, and then moved to larger discussions, and provided time for eating together and unstructured, informal conversation. It is important to have a clear understanding that what makes *dialogue* distinct from *discussion*.

Dialogue is more than a conversation, because it opens spaces to respectfully debate and challenge each other. It involves both communication and context. It has the potential for working with and through conflict, and all participants are recognized as an integral part of the process. In this way the dialogue set the stage to communicate between generations. It responds to my research questions because it involves working together with the community members to understand the dynamic elements of rural community life such as engagement, sense of community, and youth migration, from multiple perspectives. Their perspectives on *who, why* and

how community members participate in community life add rich context and real examples to highlight what was previously an explanation based on theory. In this way, it becomes *grounded theory*, anchored and contextualized by lived experience.

In Chapter 3, I emphasized the importance of the dialogue process for shifting power relations and to create a space for active participation in a conversation about concepts and ideas that are relevant to the rural community members. In this study, dialogic communication between generations focuses on Freire's idea of problem posing, stressing the process of understanding and the possibility of change that Vella (2004) explored. The possibility for change indicates the agency of the participants in a dialogue process. It moves beyond a conversation to draw participants into new and creative ways of viewing their worlds. In the following section I turn to the dialogues from one rural community to examine the learning that occurred (my own, and that of participants) and to explore how they engaged in talking about ideas and concepts related to their own experiences and interactions in the rural community. First I will talk about the process, and then the outcomes, and analyze how they contribute to building a sense of belonging and shared history. Pseudonyms are used for the dialogue participants. The first dialogue was on September 29, 2010, and the second dialogue evening was October 21, 2010.

Table 6.2: Profile of Dialogue Participants

Name	Age	Characteristics
Anna	18-24	Youth Resiliency Worker, expecting her first child
Linda	41+	Mother of 3 grown sons, one who is in grade 12, works for local government, very involved on the Parent Council
Grace	41+	Retired, very involved with her grandchildren, worked in schools
Fiona	31-35	Mother, left for university and travel, and returned, highly involved in clubs and sports, studies on-line courses in sciences and ethics
Jill	31-35	Grew up on a farm near Kitscoty, left for university and returned, mother, teaches literacy for young children in nearby city, helps on the family sheep farm/cheese shop
Andrea	25-30	Teaches at the local high school, building a house in Kitscoty
Daniel	41+	Grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan, works for government, two young children
Diana	31-35	Bachelor of Arts in Recreation Leisure Administration and a Bachelor of Education after degree. Diana has worked on the reservation and currently teaches at a nearby college
Mary	25-30	Teaches at a nearby college, mother, volunteer
Lila	31-35	Teaches music, left to study and work in a large urban centre, returned, volunteers with the local youth group, expecting first child

Exploring the Research Questions

How can an intergenerational dialogue enhance our understanding of the factors that influence rural youth engagement, and rural youth migration? As I have described previously, this was my primary research question. As the following dialogues demonstrate, an intergenerational dialogue approach provides a context to begin important conversations about participation and local community experiences. The importance of inclusion and open-ended questions are prominently articulated in the research of scholars such as Hall (2006) and Clover (2006), who emphasize the interconnected nature of healthy communities. An intergenerational dialogue framework creates space for participants to contribute their ideas and experience to consider the factors that motivate or hinder active community participation.

The responses from participants that I include in this chapter helped to answer the research sub-questions: 1) In what ways do youth/community leaders or mentors describe their individual/collective identity or responsibility in relation to this community? 2) In what ways might social networks between youth/community leaders or mentors impact youth engagement in the rural community, and their decisions to stay, leave, or return? 3) How are the factors that may influence a younger generation of rural youth staying, leaving, or returning to their community identified by youth and adults/community leaders? Within the dialogues, participants provided valuable insight about the messages (real and perceived) that younger generations might receive from the older generation, and how these messages impact participation. For example, if younger volunteers are corrected or their ideas are not considered, they may not return after a first meeting if they have taken a risk by coming out to volunteer for an organization. The unique dynamics between participants and their perspectives on dynamics and relationships in rural communities expanded my understanding of how these dynamics impact the identities and choices of rural youth. Participants offered insight and knowledge about how people and place are important to rural identity. The dialogue process also provided examples of how and in what ways an intergenerational dialogue framework might highlight the intersections of factors and networks that enhance a sense of community for rural youth. Findings from the dialogues indicate that

opportunities for participation and civic engagement, mentorship, and dialogue between generations have a positive impact on youth engagement in the rural community. I turn now to describing the dialogues and key findings.

Discovering Shared History and a Sense of Place in the Rural Community

Participants began the first dialogue by introducing themselves and responding to a question about where they felt most at home in their rural community. Answers ranged from "my classroom" in the school, to the local hockey arena, the coffee shop, Main Street, and one respondent mentioned sitting by a fire in his backyard with a drink in his hand, ready to talk with the neighbours. This initial question sparked in-depth conversation about why members felt at home in "their place." Participants added to the rich explanations of some of the key assets within the community. For example, this is concrete evidence of the important role that the local schools play in rural communities. After this opening question, dialogue participants were placed in smaller groups of 2 or 3 members. As the following dialogue exchange demonstrates, the process proved to be an excellent method for responding to the question *What is the story of this community?*   The following section of the first dialogue begins with a lot of laughter between a group of 3 participants, one age 18-24, and two adults, and illustrates the process of dialogue:

What is the story of this community?

> Anna: Growing up was very positive, adults were always there for you wherever you go.

> Linda: Around Kitscoty and going to school…it was wonderful, we had a family farm which was generational…we had the opportunity to play ball and every sport. We had so many opportunities for activities and lots of surrounding communities came too, like the green lawn picnic on July 1. We used to go that every year. Christmas concerts… it was just a great place to grow up with communities outside and inside the community, the early picnic was a must, there was a ball tournament and kids' games…

> Grace: I remember winning at the kids games…

> Anna: Being close to [a larger center] makes it easier to live in a small town – there's a desire to keep it small, but you can catch rides…you can access whatever's needed.

Grace: If anything isn't available, we could always catch rides to the bigger center.

Linda: In the past, the schools played a huge role. There was a school on the hilltop - Mom even lived in a dorm, and the other 2 schools have been such an integral binding force - it was a great force in community. New members come and they stay. Surrounding areas send their kids to Kitscoty School. And now they offer so many more options and courses, computer, media…Kids can register in an apprenticeship program, stay in school and already have 2 years towards their trade – and they don't have to be academically inclined. [Emphasis added]. Grace: Schools are an integral part – it's binding, they bring people in…they don't just come for one year, they come and they stay. They offer so much. Home Ec, Industrial Arts, some kids are shipped from Marwayne, and other towns. Now they offer so much more, computer, media, and cosmetology – even in 6 years it has changed.

Anna: And kids can register in RAP [Registered Apprenticeship Program for over 52 recognized trades]. They come out of school and can already have 2 years of apprenticeship. And that encourages them to stay here…you don't want to lose those connections. Those are important networks for work and well, that's your community. You're part of it, then. During this dialogue the laughter and shared narratives seemed to indicate that participants were comfortable sharing their stories and views of the town history, and they even began to construct a shared understanding of their rural identity. There are historical and cultural implications of maintaining a rural school and these words illustrate the power of a shared community memory. The collective history is clear in the dialogue discussion, because although the senior and adults members may share specific memories, the younger dialogue members appear attentive to these shared stories and offer their own insights into the continued importance of the rural school. This leads to further exploration of options and questions of staying and leaving that I return to later in this chapter. To illustrate the potential of dialogue to reveal different points of view, I include a second dialogue group's response to the same first question. This dialogue was between two younger members:

What is the story of your community?

[This group discussed the questions and read their responses into the recorder.]

Mary: Well, it started as agricultural – when I first arrived it was very dominated by agriculture. Growing up we saw the oil boom in late 70 and early 80s, development in south side of tracks, and early 80s also developed a subdivision in the north of Kitscoty as a response to a housing crisis.

Fiona: I think of the schools. They have a reputation of being strong schools, with good sports opportunities. Housing…Kitscoty became a bit of a bedroom community for Lloyd, but didn't have the transience, because housing prices were stable enough that people were purchasing, not just renting.

Mary: It was safe so parents knew other children and who their children were with. They could go bike riding with friends… going to the park. Just check in with mom in a few hours, when the dinner bell went. If you're in trouble, you go to the local store.

Fiona: Tradition and the events that shaped Kitscoty included turkey suppers, both church and the Ag Society [agricultural], a dinner theatre started as a fundraising for the community hall, but we've maintained those and they are well attended. Sports events…our community has always been known as "biggest little sports center" we have strong softball team, curling, hockey, ball – these have far reaching appeal across generations and young people and seniors can enjoy them – participating, playing, or coming out to cheer… vaulting, school events and Christmas concerts as well.

Mary: It's a very progressive community, small, bedroom community, it will probably not ever have big stores, it is not isolated, you can commute to a larger center in short time, but it's a small, rural community.

Together these two participants responded to the question, "Is there anything we'd change?" They agreed that on "Lifestyle, in some ways. Maybe maintain the family unit." Mary indicated a real need for families to spend time together, not necessarily in coordinated, events, but just be together. With that in mind, they have a new walking path, and golf is really economical. They stressed that activities are accessible and affordable.

So…what makes this community?

Fiona: Volunteers, and opportunities to be involved. Events, church…they are always looking for someone to bring cake, work a booth, make burgers, do a reading…there's something for any age and skill. That gives you a sense of belonging right away. Whether you're new or you have been here awhile, and people like to belong. And when you're belonging you feel welcomed, whether you have family here, or you're new here.

The final statement speaks volumes. It sums up the ways in which the process of dialogue can set the foundation to analyze why young people might stay in or return to a rural community. There are similarities in the ways the two dialogue groups talk about participation and community involvement, despite the age differences. The importance of schools is recognized across generations.

Sense of Community

The stories highlighted by the younger members of this dialogue group illustrate the importance of participating, engaging and belonging, and how those elements contribute to a sense of community. Participants described growing up in their rural community as a very positive experience, with supportive adults who were there for them. Through descriptions of various events that shaped the community, they provided a vivid portrait of vibrant rural life. They gave examples of positive school experiences, growing up on a family farm, playing ball and other sports, and endless opportunities for activities that sometimes included families from surrounding rural communities. Although there was a general sentiment that being closer to a larger center makes it easier to live in a small town, there is a desire to "keep it small".

Although transportation might be a challenge at times, in contrast to the interview data highlighted in the previous chapter, participants in the dialogues proposed that you can catch rides, carpool, and always access what is needed. The community story shared in the dialogues illustrates connections back to the literature and *sense of community theory* (McMillan and Chivas, 1986). Many of the examples illustrated a sense of belonging to a place as a member of that community. Much can be learned about common themes, but as Reimer (2007) emphasizes, each rural community is distinct. One factor that was mentioned throughout the dialogues that is especially significant for educators is the role of the local school. The school and the role of educators are mentioned throughout the dialogues, and become a prominent focal point of rural community life.

Engagement—Learning through Collective Stories and Experiences

The stories that were shared in the dialogues provide a starting place from which to examine civic participation and engagement. The following dialogue was from the first dialogue night, and is between two younger members, both young professional women, one with a young family:

> Jill: When I left here, I was never coming back. But now that I'm back and realize what I had…My husband and I went away to university and came back – we thought we might be in Calgary, but now there's no way I'd move.

> Andrea: Growing up I was involved in school groups and things. As an adult I realize that people are really welcoming here – you can volunteer. If I go and get the mail, everyone knows me and says hi. Even building a house, everyone wants to know who's coming in, or we happen to be on the same committee…

> Jill: In my class of 32, probably 20 of us live in or within driving distance from Kitscoty. Growing up if I named someone from my class, my parents just knew who I was talking about, and never questioned it – that means a lot. When I was growing up there wasn't a lot to do, we lived in the country…but someone would make the rounds and pick everyone up. Now I'm trying to get the kids to stay here and do things – like the arena on Friday night. We always knew someone who was playing hockey on a Friday night. Or "Let's go to the Wheatie" [local coffee shop]…before we had kids that's where we'd go. Moving back I realize everything we had, and I just appreciate it so much more. My husband and I left for a year – we went to Australia, and half way through our trip we thought it's great, fun, but what we had here… we were so lucky. So lucky to have that. In the past everything was here, they made it work; they didn't need to go to [a larger center].

> Andrea: Having grown up in [the closest larger center], I thought there's no way [I'd move here]. But I really wanted to teach here.

> *What kinds of events shaped Kitscoty?*

> Jill: The curling rink used to be big. Kids aren't into curling so much anymore. When I was in school that was the place to be. The arena was huge.

> Andrea: Like many rural Alberta communities, the arena was a hub. Even not being raised here, I feel it. My kids want me to come and see them play. They're always asking me to come and check it out. I feel welcome there. It's an easy place to hang out. I know parents, and the kids.

Jill: The community is driven to provide things. Like when they built the hall here, or the playground, there are always nay sayers, but others ask, "How can we help?" Not everyone wants to be on a committee, but there is a role for everyone…to be part of the labour, fundraising, or to help in any way.

Andrea: I feel that at school. If I ever need help with anything people get on board with it, and help out.

Jill: There's been lots of community driven events, everyone wants to see it grow, to support it.

Andrea: I think it's really unique that there are things like Safe and Caring and ACE [Active, Engaged, Creative community initiative] that people are so passionate about wanting to see things happen here – like Zumba [dance class] at the gym last night – 25 people turned up. It's so great to make those things happen in a town of 900. The instructor was great. The first week there were 10 people, and then it's awesome that people want to stay here. We don't need to run into Lloyd all the time.

Jill: I'm a stay at home mom, and I want to base my life here. If I wanted to be in town every day, then I'd live in town. I don't want to be in [a larger center]. I can occupy myself, but if I need milk, I go into our community store. It might cost a little bit more, but I want to support it. I want those resources here.

Andrea: I wanted to join hip hop class and someone said – why don't you just do it in [a larger center], but I said, I want to be involved in this community. I teach there. I'm building our home there…I want to be part of the community…

Jill: It's fun…sometimes you just need see how it goes, it's goofy, but planning things like that is part of it.

The two participants discuss adult hip hop, the Safe and Caring initiatives, and how they would like to pitch in to help and keep activities like aerobics at the local gymnasium going. One of their husbands found out that there might not be an adult hockey team, and realized that the "young guys want to play hockey but they don't want to run and organize things... but how are you going to keep it going if you're not involved?" Andrea's fiancé has also had the opportunity to play with a local team. They play against each other and the older teachers. The spirit of being involved is clear.

Is there anything I'd change?

Jill: I have to say that some people see it as a bedroom community, but that's those who live in Lloyd and houses are cheaper here…they drive back and forth – that always happens.

Andrea: I don't live here yet, but it's not just about work for me. I'm really involved in community life.

Jill: We have things like the walking trails…, my in-laws went to check it out. And they'll be cleared in the winter, so it's more than just a loop…

What makes the community a welcoming place?

Jill: I'm related to half the town…you can always find out how it's going on…like with combining [harvesting grain]…

Andrea: It's a matter of feeling safe here. In Edmonton or Lloyd ["Lloyd" is a term used by local residents for the small city of Lloydminster, 20 kilometers from Kitscoty], people worry about kids….now my fiancé and I are ready to have a family and we don't want to worry about that. That's a huge part of it.

Jill: My son and I go to the library every week, and now I know [the librarian], and see her on the street…

Andrea: You walk down the street and people say "hi" even if they don't know you.

Jill: I get waved to all the time when I'm driving. It's friendly, I like that.

Andrea: And I love clean streets, people take pride here.

Jill: Most people take pride in living here. I'm not saying we don't have vandalism…

Andrea: You notice it in the schools, too, youth are more polite. It resonates throughout the community…not that everyone is that way, but the majority. It's the norm rather than the exception…

Jill: Have you noticed the younger kids – do they volunteer? Are they as involved?

Andrea: Ohhhh, that's an unfortunate point, I'd say…it's on a dying slope, unfortunately. I run the leadership at school, and well, I am the leader. I

have to beg the kids who are vice [president] and president to help with things, and that wasn't the case 10 years ago when I was pres.
Jill: I see that in my own family, too. I'm one of five, the second of five, and the youngest just bought a house in Mundare…I said, "Are you getting involved?" They said, "I'll do what I do with my friends, and that's it." But being part of a community and making things happen, it only works because there are people being involved who are doing those things behind the scenes. If you want it, you've got to make it happen. She's kind of like, "Hmm, yeah..."

Andrea: I think it's a sense of entitlement; they had everything given to them. A different generation. They have everything given to them. It goes through cycles.

Jill: I hope so, because to have a community so based on people who give their time… that's how things happen.

Andrea: Knowing parents who volunteer… I'm curious if that's what happens. Do they do it because their parents do? I know that's the case for me. I saw my parents involved, with 4-H and things, and I volunteered too.

Jill: Me too, it's interesting to see what will happen with that. In my graduating class, there's tons of us around, and then one of my sisters, not so many, but another – asked me, "How do you get on these committee?" I just come out…but not everyone is like that.

What makes a community a welcoming place?

Jill and Andrea agree: A feeling of security, like you belong.

Clearly, a sense of belonging is understood by dialogue participants to be linked to participating and engaging in community life and events. This participation is not without bias or conflict, as participants revealed. In the second dialogue night participants responded to scenario questions based on our previous conversations and the content from the first dialogue. One example was shared during the second dialogue that poignantly illustrates the dynamic elements and inherent tensions in civic participation. It involved a young man volunteering for a community event for the first time. He was asked to make the salad, but an older, more experienced member then examined his efforts and re-created it. He did not return. This simple example provides a vivid starting point for a discussion about volunteering and communication across generations:

Daniel: I think you see the whole scenario in dinner theatre… everyone's got a bit of a role, and for the most part everyone's got along fairly well. Some of the groups do really well together, others struggle more, but all of them have fun and feel good about doing it. We're fortunate to have groups that will come out help…For the most part, they get integrated fairly well into things.

Anna: Can we focus on coming out with outcomes, and goals, not just one way [of doing things].

Daniel: Be open to differences. If it's always been done that way, is there a common goal. Or say," We're here to help" and give a suggestion, a pointer…

How are new volunteers invited or included?

Anna: Friends, or someone already connected, word of mouth... They're recruited.

Daniel: Like hockey for example…if we don't have these positions filled, we don't have a team. If you want this to happen, you have to participate. I'm a firm believer – if you want it to happen, step up to the plate. Why should you get a free ride on the back of others?

As this dialogue exchange demonstrates, the dialogue participants responded to a scenario question based on this example. They provided insight and reflected on what other community groups might do, or how they might handle a situation differently in the future. While in some cases, there are more positive interactions between generations, such as the dinner theatre, where Daniel noted that "everyone's got a bit of a role" and "for the most part everyone gets along fairly well" others recognized differences of opinion and practice but emphasized that everyone has the intention to help, and that "offering a suggestion" would be a more constructive and inclusive approach. Participants suggested creating outcomes and goals, not just one way of getting work done in the community. As Anna suggested, it is vital to be open to difference and finding common goals. As the dialogue continued, dialogue members agreed that some of the groups work very well together, while others struggle more. Usually they get along well, but it is the "for the most part" that would be interesting to probe further. It enters into more nuanced territory in terms of some of the challenges inherent in volunteering and participating in community life, and some of the dialogue I highlight in subsequent sections addresses possible

tensions. Later this conversation was extended between Daniel and another
participant, Diana:

> *Is there a range of ages on local community boards?*
>
> > Diana: Not on very many
> >
> > Daniel: Mostly from what I see there's a mix, if you do get the young people
> > involved they want to keep things in progress, and if things get a little
> > mundane you tend to lose them. That's the hardest thing. We struggle with
> > that with the hall board all the time… and anybody who comes to a Safe and
> > Caring [Committee] meeting, they like seeing young people there, meetings
> > are over at 8:00pm, it's one of the better groups for moving forward, you
> > don't dwell on things at all…
> >
> > Diana: Right, you don't dwell on things at all…and you're right, there's not a
> > meeting every month, only before big events.
> >
> > Is there a range of different backgrounds?
> >
> > Diana: Well, for minor hockey there's different backgrounds, but not ages…
> > there's NOT currently much of an age gap in hockey board. And the ball
> > league, I was careful not to go to the board meeting this year so that I
> > wouldn't be conned into anything – [she laughs]… If I have a baby…
> >
> > Daniel: Then you'll get a fightin' chance…[of not taking on a major role].
> > [They also discuss golf here]. That's the thing, for minor ball, if you go to
> > meetings you get roped into it. I think it's the leaders who should take on
> > those roles; in a small community we don't have enough people who are
> > passionate about it to fill those roles. You always run the risk of people
> > asking "Why does he want to lead everything? He's passionate about it,
> > that's what he loves to do – him or her…
> >
> > Diana: There's an example from minor hockey… [Both participants agreed
> > that they are passionate, but sometimes they need to look at it differently.
> > They discuss the example of minor hockey].
> >
> > Daniel: Put the shoe on the other foot – things aren't always cut and dry.
> > Sometimes there's a little bit of grey area
> >
> > Diana: Even on kindergarten Board of Directors, with the executive, there's
> > not even a big age range –and there is a huge number of kids.

Daniel and Diana give the example of day care – some parents have 3 or 4 kids, and
some are "back to it for a second time" after having more children, for some, they
were on the executive the first time, and now they sit back and let others make

decisions, because "it's someone else's turn. It's nice that way, there's some space to be involved…"

> Daniel: There's a pretty good mix on council. We've got a couple of gentlemen, a lady, and one with an active growing family…That changes the dynamics a but, it makes it more interesting, brings new dynamics to the plate…[they discuss who was part of it] .

> Diana: They are invited or recruited. It's mostly Minor Hockey for boys in Phys Ed, we're getting some [volunteers] through the Conquest [leadership] program,   they need to do so many hours of volunteering, and the young kids love it, they aren't a parent…

> Daniel: I've seen that with [the youth resiliency worker] where she got involved with the schools…the kids really took to her, she's got some authority, but also one of us. It's neat to see. It makes a difference.

Considering Inclusion, Power and Privilege

In order to understand who is included in rural community life, and how best to support inclusion and participation, it is essential to examine the roots of the key messages (real or perceived) that rural community members hear about that value of their contribution. In the first dialogue I asked about who participates in community life, and included the question, "Are youth participating in community life?" Participants spoke in larger group discussion about how youth are helping with coaching, and a high percentage volunteer in schools, tournaments, leadership, or putting on dances. They mentioned the high responses of youth to specific initiatives like the Terry Fox run, and commented that they do volunteer "to a certain extent" though "less around age 18-23, because they are in school, concentrating on studies, or gone." However, others claimed that "once they get their education behind them, they come back." High school aged young people are often engaged through community service activities in which they earn credit for volunteer hours. Dialogue participants noted that this was one key way to learn about community and engage in rural community life. The following dialogue exchange picks up on this question of youth participation in community life, and if they are, in what ways.

> Lila: Sometimes I wished we had the advantages of bigger schools, like music, or drama…because I was so involved in music... But you can go to Lloyd. You can take Cosmetology or Heavy Duty Mechanics.

Laura: Buffalo Trail is pretty good, they make it easy to go, too, if you're not happy with school, your funding follows you. Like students from Marwayne who came here because we had a good basketball program. You can find what you need.

Lila: Like I do remember, we were lucky, in grade 10, 11, 12, we were allowed to choose what we wanted to do, and every semester I changed my focus, because there were all these areas that interested me. That was huge for me. Or cosmetology, even though I knew that wasn't the future for me… Or business classes, my brother asked me about it and I said - just to explore and figure out what you want. It's awesome. Take them. Take advantage of that.

Linda: But if you're taking academic classes, your days are full. Lila: I remember with the extra courses I wanted – I'll just fit it in. [Discussion if you take every Science, English, Math course you do not have room for extracurricular activities. There is a need for strong guidance from educators and parents.]

Linda: Then they'd need to let go of band for hockey academy first and second period. So the students could have done it, but it would have been a really tight schedule.

The dialogue participants explained that the hockey academy is a program that teaches skills like skating and the sport. It also encompasses nutrition, overall fitness, and leadership. It is new within the last 6 years. The participants discuss band before school, sports and share a lot of laughter between the generations. They talk about "what matters, priorities." They also note that there are "those who are everywhere, maybe not getting that much done…"

The dialogue participants shared valuable insights about challenges with competing priorities, especially for young people still in high school, but also shared insight into how new volunteers are encouraged to participate. They noted that they are often invited or recruited through friends or connected through word of mouth. They indicated that this is often a critical, urgent need, and people respond to it. In the example of volunteer recruitment for the minor hockey league, they made it clear that without volunteer participation behind the scenes, there was no team. If you want it to happen in a rural community, was the resounding response, you have to participate. When I asked if there a range of ages on local boards, the response was "not very many". However, success in getting a range of volunteers is often linked to a sense of momentum or progress.

Other dialogue members agree that it is important to ensure that meetings "count." For example, some suggest only have meetings before big events, or planning specifically for actions. This conversation about local planning and some of the strengths of various groups offered valuable insight into the potential to retain new or younger volunteers, and ways of organizing that enhance participation and long-term commitment. In terms of who is included or excluded, there was general agreement that if you want to participate, it is possible. Although most activities include a range of backgrounds, there is not always a mix of ages. For example, the minor hockey board has volunteers of varying backgrounds, but not much of an age range on the board of directors. There was laughter and positive statements throughout the dialogue process, even though some of the topics are not easy. One or two groups were mentioned as "scooping you up if you show up with a heartbeat" or "be careful if you show up in case you're conned into anything". Although this was said in jest, these are real issues, and the process of the dialogue seemed to set the stage for a conversation that was honest but approachable. Some organizations or teams were noted as the types where if you go to meetings you "get roped into" committees or other tasks. But there was also an impression that sometimes the leaders should take on those roles in a small community if there are not enough people who are passionate about filling them.

Are there some people who do the bulk of the volunteering? It was notable that there was only one male participant who took part in the dialogues. Although dialogue participants agreed that women made up the majority of the volunteers in town, many others stated that it was "mixed" and their male partners volunteered for other things like the Agricultural Board, or sports teams, or that they often volunteered together as couples or as a family. A few members laughed and said their husbands were home taking care of the kids so that they could have the "night off" to volunteer. Participants agreed that enthusiasm and commitment were important. However, to what extent can participation include or exclude community members? Are others encouraged to participate, or are there subtle forms of power at play? As Daniel explains, sometimes they need to look at it differently. The examples of the kindergarten and day care board were held up as examples of how

boards can effectively include a mix of older and newer members. Town council was provided as an example of gender participation, including one member with an "active growing family" and although it is not clear if selecting board members with age and gender in mind is deliberate, members expressed the value of having members with various backgrounds and life stages. That changes the dynamics, but it makes it more interesting and diverse, explains Daniel.

Identifying and Building on Community Assets

Through the process of interviewing each other in the dialogue, participants named and emphasized some key resources and assets in the community. For example, they spoke about community members who are part of various groups, and discussed the process of inviting and recruiting new participants. Minor Hockey was mentioned specifically for attracting participation across generations, and through the local high school and Conquest program, where students do a required number of volunteer hours. Another young person was cited as an example of a young person who stayed in the rural community and is considered a role model to younger students.

The manner in which the dialogue participants carefully considered how invitations and participation is approached within the rural community indicated willingness to question and discuss this process. It offered insight into the ways in which younger members might be included, but also leads to additional questions of what percentage of the community population volunteers, how young people who are not already active in leadership roles or sports in the high school *become* involved, especially if their parents or peer group are not active volunteers, and to what extent attempts were made to bridge across divides between those who are active members and those who are not involved. Some of these questions are addressed in subsequent sections focused on the findings from the interviews with the dialogue participants. The dialogues provide a starting point for further discussion with the participants. A key element to understanding the potential link between generations through the dialogue process is how the younger generation imagines the future, and how this compares or contrasts with the older members' views.

Imagining the Future

An important aspect of the dialogue process was problem posing and imagining scenarios. I discuss problem posing in greater depth later in this chapter. The following transcript from the second dialogue expands on this point:

> *How do you see your role?*
>
> Both participants discussed their role "As adults, as the next community members…"
>
> Jill: We'll take over Blackfoot – maybe Lloyd eventually.
>
> Andrea: I think Kitscoty will continue growing…maybe level out a little bit, but continue to grow, as long as the schools keep doing what they're doing, the schools will always do very well…[They discuss the option of Kitscoty school or a larger center].
>
> Andrea: The biggest thing is Lloyd has Saskatchewan [school] curriculum. All kids that come to Lloyd to play hockey want to come to us, and take school with the Alberta curriculum. Maybe they have honours…it's a big drive and another important thing is the role that teachers have…we've got long standing teachers and no turnover of teachers.
>
> Jill: Are the teachers coming in community-minded? Will they stay? The previous generation chose to stay, raise their kids, and become community-minded.

When asked "How do you see your role?" in the community, it is important to note that younger dialogue members talk about themselves as "the next community members". Is the focus of attention in intergenerational dialogue to be on the adults or the youth? Who needs to change, and who is responsible for the future of rural communities? My response to this question, based on the findings from this study, is that it could be either, and ideally, both. For a deeper level of understanding to occur, exchanges between the generations offers insight into the local playing field, context and community drivers, while the perspective from only one generation lacks the nuances and depth of analysis. An intergenerational dialogue framework provides a forum for this exchange to occur, and to extend these new understandings through sustained discussion and debate. Although these debates can happen less formally in the community, participants were quick to point out that their opinions are sometimes dismissed, or lost in a setting where other community members' voices may be

considered to be more important or relevant. The intergenerational dialogue serves the purpose for these exchanges to be by design, rather than by default. The dialogue situates youth as part of the larger community, with the responsibility, identity and belonging that comes with membership. In other words, setting the stage for these links between generations is a gesture that says these conversations matter, and youth participation in this process is essential.

A specific example that came out of the dialogue for this study was the hope for growth and focus on the schools playing a unifying role in the community. This also brings us back to Theobald's (1997) connection of a sense of place and the vital role of rural schools in fostering a sense of community. Dialogue participants indicated that in this particular community, the schools and the curriculum directly enhance rural education and the sense of belonging to the community. As participants explained, students who play hockey in the nearby larger center want to take the Alberta school curriculum. A direct example of this is that Lloydminster uses Saskatchewan school curriculum, whereas Kitscoty schools implement Alberta curriculum. Although this may not seem like a significant factor to those not directly connected with the provincial education systems, schools are a foundation of rural community life, and because school closures signal the demise of many rural towns, it is considered an important factor in the sustainability of this rural community. Students are concerned about getting honours grades and keeping their future options open, dialogue participants explained. Teachers play an important role, and participants raise important questions about new teachers. Are they "community-minded?" Will they stay? The previous generation chose to stay and raise their families here. This has added to the social fabric and sustainability of the rural community. The focus on living in the community and truly investing is one that is increasingly important in a province where work in the oil and gas industry may lead to home ownership in a rural area but living and working outside the community. The questions raised in the dialogue, and the pivotal question, "Will they stay?" resonate with new research initiatives within rural Alberta that respond to questions of youth retention, re-attraction, and recruitment, and attracting professionals to rural communities (Rural Alberta Development Network, 2011).

Other dialogue participants also posed foundational questions about staying and contributing to rural community life. The question of retention and the underlying theme of community engagement is a critical one:

> Daniel: We battle that with everything we do. For a while we didn't have an RCMP living in town here, and it made a huge difference…even though we had a detachment, there were no houses available…so they lived in Lloyd. Just the visibility, a cop car in your crescent, that feeling of safety. Not having to wait. It's about presence. Instead of waiting 45 minutes. For example, kids maybe causing trouble. I was up with the baby one night – maybe they weren't up to anything bad, but it's the perception of keeping an eye on things. There's an example of mentoring – the RCMP at day care – it shows they are your friend, they have a purpose, you can turn to them if you need to – kids really enjoyed it.
> Diana: Or teachers…
>
> Daniel: Yeah, teachers – some are hard assed, or friends…but there is always someone – good and bad. It's very important to have them in your community, to see them out and about in your community…to see them as human.
>
> Diana: We still have a private kindergarten – that's very important – at one time the county looked after the school – all Alberta kindergartens started as private.

As is evident in this dialogue, retention or re- attracting young people and professions to the community is struggle. As Daniel explained in the dialogue and in subsequent discussions, for a while there was no RCMP living in town, and it made a difference to a feeling of safety and security in the community. Even though there was an RCMP detachment, there were no houses available, so they lived in a larger center nearby. As the participants explained, visibility mattered in terms of the public perception of someone being part of the community, in other words, "invested". For example, to see a police car in your crescent provided a feeling of safety. As Daniel explained, there is a perception that professionals like the RCMP officers who choose to live in the community have the best interests of the rural community at heart.

Mentorship

Keeping the interests of the local community at the core of work and community life was a key point made unanimously by dialogue participants. In one dialogue group this led to discussion of how commitment is also modeled to a younger generation.

Mentoring was clearly articulated in this context. The local RCMP visits to the day care are an example of this communication between the generations, and they begin the message early: Your community matters to us. The older generation is present and ready to support the younger community members, and you can turn to them if you need to. Not surprisingly, there is a level of trust apparent throughout the dialogue. It seems the message extends to the older generation, too. This community matters. Safety, families, and a feeling of belonging are important. Diana notes that the community values their rural education, and the local decision-making that it encourages. Teachers are also cited as examples of the importance of community leaders to live and work in the community. The focus is on living in the community, and to see them as human. This humanness and a willingness to work together illustrates the sense of connection and belonging, or "membership" that McMillian and Chavis (1986) describe as being a key factor in creating a sense of community. In what ways might this enhance a sense of commitment to the community, or of solidarity and agency? To what degree might this impact both youth and adults' willingness to be involved in civic life? In response to those questions, I turn to a dialogue about governance and participation.

Leadership and Civic Responsibility

During the second dialogue there was evidence of an increased level of awareness and consciousness was being built. I posed a question related to civic participation in municipal government: Imagine that town council required equal numbers of young people, high school age, 30s and adults and seniors, and each of them will have an equal vote. How might this impact how decisions are made?

> Linda: Well I think if more perspectives are represented there will be different discussion, with everyone presenting their different ideas of community needs they will come away with a better understanding of what the whole community needs rather than just one age group.

> Lila: You are going to find that seniors are going to want something different than what the youth want, and those in the middle…you'd be amazed at what being 32 you going to have "well, I get…where you're going with this, and I totally get where you're coming from. You're probably going to get a sense that everyone has a say, and with the middle age group too, they'll want to be

more involved. And maybe the seniors will see that…they tend to be the leaders, but maybe they also want to say, hey buck up.

This insight into the potential for learning from different points of view demonstrates the need for more opportunities to connect youth and adults to share these goals, and to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and possible responses. In the next section, Grace actually names the need to consider various perspectives, and differences in context.

Linda: Is that the case, Grace?

Grace: Well, I don't know, we tend to say, well, 30 years ago that's not how it was done, but then you also have to look at things are different, families are different so therefore we can say all that we want to say, but we have to look at the different perspectives.

Lila: Unfortunately, and it's sad, but so often my age group and younger tend to think, "Well what's in it for me?" unfortunately, we tend to be, "how is this going to benefit me or my family, you know? It's a sad state, you know. My parents have tried to tell us, a lot of people in my, a lot of my friends how it will benefit them, but in my parents' generation, or even my aunts and uncles, it's more like, the community would benefit from this…it's more of a sense of well, I may not benefit directly, but my grandkids, or even my neighbor's kids will get something out of it…

Linda and Grace: You're building for the future.

Lila: Yeah, you're building for the future, and they are able to see that because even as my parents said, "It's all about the community" Growing up it was "all about the community". Whereas, it's a sad state, but for us it's like, this is my box…

This conversation illustrates the shift from communal values to individual needs, and how it is possible to strengthen awareness about these trends, and to reexamine collective priorities and ways of engaging as citizens that Putnam (2007) and Carr and Kefalas (2009) explore.

Linda: Why do you think that has evolved though?

Lila: I think that we ended up getting very selfish. I don't blame any one thing, but I know when I think about my priorities, there's times when I think, I know that I should…

How has that changed, for example…?

Linda: (Laughter). I've always been very involved. I don't know if that's because my parents were involved. Or I tend to take leadership roles…I think I'm quite opinionated…I do try to help out, and I do try to see the bigger picture, I try to make decisions based on what is best for community as a whole, or school as a whole, minor hockey as a whole, Safe and Caring as a whole, rather than saying, "what's in it for me." My boys are all basically grown now, my youngest is in grade 12, but that won't end my involvement in the community. If I believe that we all get more out of life if we give to our communities…

Lila: That's totally true. Before I moved away I was involved in so much. When I was in high school… but my parents were the same too, and my brothers. But you move to a big city that changes. I'll bet you'd see the difference in those who stayed, and those who left and came back or those who never left.

Grace: …When you're living in the city though, unless you have a community involvement with people, like the playground, or hockey, you tend to…you tend to…your job is over here, and your children are either going to school here or day care here…I'm referring to my own kids here…you come home and you're just in your own cul de sac, and may not see that hockey needs you or the curling club needs you or there's a need in a smaller town you see it.

Grace: When we were talking about the different age groups you…I have 4 grown children, and grandchildren…maybe you come back to family again. I want the weekends if we're going to go and visit the grandchildren I don't want to be tied up having to work at the hockey rink or seniors center. I tend to want to go back and take that stuff off my plate, now. I noticed on the post office that the hockey rink is looking for workers…

[Laughter] – Ohh you saw that one…

Linda: I do think though that there is a bit of a misconception about the younger age group being too busy. I get this from the hockey rink – "Just let me pay my $200… I don't want to work it because I'm too busy, but it does take a community to run these things, and I do think it's a misconception that the younger age group is busier than my age group…

Grace: We were talking about that today…I think in a way it is because of the way that jobs are today…people are working shift work. Nurses are working 12 hours, a lot of offices are working longer hours for 4 days and then you get Fridays off. The whole scenario of work is different.

Linda: But I think that would be the same whether you're a 50 year old still in the work force or a 30 year old still in the work force.

Lila: Not necessarily. When I worked in an office I worked longer hours than my boss. I was the younger person and my boss had already put his time in…you know they're like, "I've done this. It's your turn". Especially if you're the one who doesn't have kids…

Grace: But [Linda], you've worked while you had children and you can make it work if you want to. I guess it's a little bit different because you used to be able to hire a baby sitter for $5 an hour and now it's $16, or you pay $12 an hour just so you can go to a meeting…

Lila: I have friends for "small group" that just bring their kids… for 2 hours it costs them $50, for 2 hours – then you go and pick them up, drop them off….

Although the dialogue was focused and the participants were attentive to the voices of the three generations, Lila, one of the younger members had this insight: Seniors may have different priorities than the youth. This new level of awareness reveals a shift in understanding that can occur through direct engagement between generations. The dialogue process was very interesting at this point, because there was a senior member in the group who was then asked about her opinion, and to clarify if this was the case. As Grace expressed, "…we have to look at the different perspectives". The younger member provided a perspective that may be seen as stereotypical of "youth" as a generation. While it is important not to lump all "youth" together in a category, hearing her words provides insight into what might be widely held views or perceptions between generations, "… so often my age group and younger tend to think, "*Well what's in it for me?*" This comment may reflect how young people see their community and their role within it.

While both older members of the group agreed that community involvement and discussions are part of building for the future, Lila offered the contrast between generations from her view. While she also emphasized a future focus, she noted that her parents believed "It's all about the community" when she was growing up. She described some sadness at a younger generation focusing, in contrast, on what she called their "in box". This reference to technology was also an interesting choice of words, and later Lila would elaborate on ways one might engage with a younger generation over social media, such as eliciting involvement for committees or feedback and participation in meetings over Facebook and Skype or other

technological tools. When asked by other dialogue members if the shift in focus from community to what might benefit an individual or family is changing or if it has evolved, Lila spoke about being self-absorbed and "getting very selfish" about priorities, and being part of a generation asking, "…but what's in it for me?" The honesty with which she spoke about a perspective between generations illustrates the risk involved in the process of dialogue, but also the potential for growth and increased understanding that comes from posing problems and potential responses or deeper questioning. The other participants appeared to approach the discussion with curiosity and openness to participation and further questioning. Elements of trust and safety are essential to the dialogue process, and yet, there may be times to push somewhat beyond one's comfort zone.

This particular dialogue triad involved three generations. Participants engaged and shared with respect and the conversation did not overtly confront or challenge a particular view. While there were differences in opinion and a range of perspectives were evident, counterpoints (especially between generations) were offered with humour and insight. This exchange illustrates how new understandings of local issues can have direct benefits for those who live there, and could help to shape policy on a broader scale. For example, when asked how the nature of participation may have changed between generations, Linda, a parent of 3 older boys, laughs when she explains that she has always been involved with leadership roles, and although she may be viewed as "quite opinionated" she tries to make decisions based on what is best for community as a whole.

Engagement and Participation

Discussion of barriers to participation and the potential to pose differences of opinion enriches the dialogue process and move it beyond the realm of a conversation. There is potential for delving deeper into understanding issues and potential differences between generations. There is also the risk of perpetuating power dynamics that already exist, or creating additional barriers to participation through whose voices are heard and who is silent or silenced in the process. The next dialogue exchange illustrates the potential for dialogue members to respond to more challenging questions and the possibility to use dialogue as a foundation for agency or action.

Through problem posing, we can unpack a range of limits, possibilities, and risks to a scenario and consider these from various perspectives. In this way, youth and adults have a direct influence on thinking about rural settings and contributing their knowledge to developing rural policy. A clear example occurs when the group shifts the focus to discuss childcare costs and barriers to participation. There is ample time and a significant level of trust at this point for the members to ask each other for contrasting experiences, and to listen to how these experiences are revealed, even if they are quite different from their own. Youth may have a limited understanding of the implications of some of the issues and potential responses, but an intergenerational dialogue process provides a means for an older generation to provide insight into the local context, and the process adds validity for both youth and adults to contribute their knowledge in a way that counts. In this way, there is a recognition and legitimization of voice that cuts across generations, and redistribution of power with an opportunity to engage. The next question puts this to the test. The question is posed during the second dialogue, "What would happen if the town wanted the seniors' center to be a youth center?"

> Linda: Grace, did we not try this at one time?

> Grace: We tried a youth center. We did, it was in the legion hall. It was a dismal disaster.

> Linda: What happened? I can't remember.

> Grace: From what I can understand there wasn't a lot of participation and then what I ultimately heard was the end of it was the leaders were saying we've got to shut the lights off at a certain time and get this place cleaned up and youth saying, " well, no, this is our center…" You clean it up… I was never directly involved.

> Linda: That was what, maybe 10 years ago?

> Grace: That's the longest stretch that we had it, as a result of those meetings, and from what I understand it wasn't very successful, a very successful thing. You know, we do have a lot in this village for youth, for seniors, for children, for young people. We do, and I don't feel we need to stretch it any more. I do understand that some of the things you can be involved in are expensive, but the school has activities to no end.

Lila: The schools have lots of activities.

Linda: They do. We're so fortunate to have the schools. And I think that the schools have broadened their scope -- it used to be sports, but now there's a drama club, a band program…I'm trying to think if there's still an art group…

Grace: I don't think so, not in Kitscoty, but you can access that in Lloyd.

Lila: All of that is since I graduated. There was no drama club. Yeah we had band, but it was in the mornings…if you weren't in sports there wasn't anything else really. I totally believe in sports. I love sports, but if there wasn't anything else…

Grace: But to have a successful drama club and art club, you have to have leaders. Maybe small towns can't always do that. Lakeland College taking drama…

Linda: Even the band programs have tremendous support outside the school. It's the community, "Friends of Music" that do fundraising for it, and without that could it function? I think probably not. We pay for instrument repairs, we pay for field trip costs, bussing, and we buy instruments every year. The community groups make it function, in conjunction with the school.

Grace: I talked to… they put that new youth center in Lloyd…I sat at the same table as [someone who was very involved] at the banquet and asked "is this really used a lot?" and she said, you would not believe it, but I kind of got a sense that some of the kids went there for a meal.

Lila: You would not believe…it's a different issue in Lloyd.

Grace: It's a whole different issue. I got the sense that it is almost taking the place of a home. She told me some stories…

Lila: There's just so many kids that don't have place to go…

Grace: That youth center or that youth group is a whole different place than just to come and hang out.

Linda: Well even if they come to hang out they need something to do…

Grace: And they need supervision.

Lila: What I've noticed working with youth, and I've worked with a lot of youth, is that – well I'm not that old, actually – but if you give them the responsibility and the ownership, they take ownership and will not leave it a mess. And it's easier to have a peer say, "Enough's enough. Really, enough's

enough now." You know, it's not like an adult came up to you and said, "Clean up that mess."

Linda: But the leadership among their peers needs to be there, "Ok crew, let's start cleaning up…"

Grace: Yup.

Linda: Or however they do it, that still takes a certain type of personality.

Lila: It does. And every class, or community, will have the ones that say, ok, and it might not be the ones who are the most popular it may be the ones who…

Linda: They want to make things happen.

The previous section demonstrates a level of consciousness about agency and who the players or drivers are within the community. It also indicates that both you and adults have ideas of how to enhance broad-based participation, although as the next portion of the discussion illustrates, there may be limits to how comfortable members are with who participates and how community members enhance or limit these interactions.

> Grace: I would think – I can't speak for the whole Seniors Centre, but I would think, if a group of young people wanted to use the center once a week – and they had a plan – I don't see why they couldn't have it…I just don't see it being a drop-in center.

> Linda: Well, there's a Safe and Caring drop in at the school. You pay a Two-nie and there's Zumba dancing, or whatever you call it, and volleyball…there's quite a number of things. It's so interesting to see the ages. You know, it's the whole gamut.

> Lila: There's always going to be a need – communities big and small -- Caring and Sharing? "Safe and Caring" – that's something that a young person who maybe doesn't have the best home life – you're going to find those young people in every community, and that's something that they might get really excited about, someone who cares about my well-being. That's what a youth center is all about, so that people who don't feel they are loved and cared about at home…and there's 100s of them…they can find that.

> Lila: You know I worked with a youth group [in an urban center] where some of the youth hadn't seen a bath in weeks. They hadn't seen foods in…days. You know they'd go to school without any food or money. It breaks your

heart. I just want to give them everything. But what you can give them is to treat them like they matter.

When we examine the dialogue more closely, it is important to note that the participations begin by talking about how this was tried at one time, but was not considered to be a successful venture. The senior member of the group recalls some of the details, and that it was a "dismal disaster". The other members ask for clarification about what happened, as they do not remember. From what the member who knew the story could recall, there was limited participation, and some conflicts over closing time, leadership, and whose responsibility it was to care for it and clean it up. This was a decade ago, and as she understood it, that was the longest period of time that there has been a youth center. It was not very successful. They emphasize that they have a lot in the village for youth, for seniors, and for children. It is agreed between the participants (and across the three generations represented here) that the schools have lots of activities. However, Lila emphasizes that these are all initiatives since she graduated. As she recalls, "…if you weren't in sports there wasn't anything else really…" Grace reconsiders, "But to have a successful drama club and art club, you have to have leaders. Maybe small towns can't always do that." She notes the local colleges such as Lakeland, and opportunities to take drama.

There are potential barriers for participation with transportation if you are not in sports, emphasizes Lila, and some challenges with costs. These are all valid points and may impede participation. However, Linda illustrates the various sources of community support. As she explains, even the band programs have support outside the school, through community fundraising. She remarks that the community makes these initiatives function, in conjunction with the school. This support and partnership is an area to explore further in the interviews. Again the school is a focal point of the community, but it is the *integrated* approach to supporting youth and community programs that is evident in the dialogue.

Partnership – An Integrated and Supportive Approach

As the dialogue unfolds, it circles around again to the issue of a youth center. One participant gives the example of a youth center in the nearby city. As Grace describes, she talked with someone about that youth center and how it is serving

significant needs in the community, such as youth needing to be fed, or to find a community. This sparks a conversation in the dialogue group about the contrast between the social fabric and the needs for youth support in various communities. A youth center responds to a different social issue in a larger center, dialogue participants agree, almost serving the same need as a home for the young people. As Lila stresses young people need a place where they belong. Throughout the discussion, Grace maintains, a youth center needs to serve a different purpose than just a hang out, and they all agree on some key points. Youth need to have something to do, a sense of purpose and supervision. As Lila explains, youth will take ownership for something that they value. In this exchange, dialogue participants demonstrate a key element of the process - their ability to find common goals, or common ground. They agree that to meet the needs of youth in the rural community, leadership among their peers is essential, along with support from adults. This reciprocal communication is an example of the power of intergenerational communication, and builds a foundation for partnership.

These interactions demonstrate how dialogue can balance power and privilege and begin to build trust and inclusion. The second part of one of the scenario dialogue about a proposed youth center provides evidence for how community members speak about collective organizing within the community. Elements of "trust" and "risk" to which Vella (2004) refers are evident in the dialogue. How might this theory be sensitively applied to understand rural community development in the context of Kitscoty? The dialogue process, especially one that involves different generations, provides an opportunity for discussion. It leaves room for empathy and space to unpack or untangle some of the potentially messy dimensions of civic life, such as who holds the power in community groups, who is included and who is excluded.

Throughout the dialogue there are moments of clarifying opinions and roles. At one point, Grace, the senior member offers a perspective that although she "can't speak for the whole Seniors Centre" she feels if a group of young people wanted to use the center once a week and they had a plan, they could work something out, but "…I just don't see it being a drop in center." The distinction seems to be in the plan,

organization, and sense of purpose, rather than a "drop in" center. There are other opportunities in the community for all ages to be involved, for example, a Safe and Caring drop in at the school, with Zumba dancing, volleyball, and other activities for a range of ages. However, Lila offers this insight on the importance of a youth center: There is always going to be a need – in communities big and small – for a community that is "safe and caring." She elaborates, that is something that a young person can expect of a community with the social needs of its members in mind. She explains that those young people are found in every community and that they all need someone who cares about their well-being. As she puts it, "That's what a youth center is all about, so that people who don't feel they are loved and cared about at home…and there's 100s of them…they can find that."

Problem Posing

A dialogue process is contextual, but I observed that the participants in this dialogue seemed able to transcend the boundaries of the rural community and illustrate the value of problem posing beyond their immediate community. This extension from a local focus to a broader understanding of issues that are highly relevant to the rural context illustrates the potential for dialogue to extend from local concerns to a discussion with broader relevance. For example one dialogue participant put her views into the context of some of the work she has done with youth in an urban center. Her point is relevant in a rural community too, to treat a younger generation as though they matter. The importance of engaging youth was affirmed by all the participants. Engagement offers the opportunity to share viewpoints, to have young people understand older people, and older people understand the youth. However, the process of dialogue may create a space for active debate and exchange, that action or implementation takes time and focused effort, as well as community and financial supports. As Grace claimed, it takes time, and Lila conceded with the example of a skate park that was not approved by the town. This story was mentioned numerous times in the community.

Despite the local examples provided in the dialogues, the depth to which youth might be involved in local decisions and organizing did not extend into areas of major conflict or tension. This was in contrast to one of the key

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stakeholder interviews with Lucinda who has worked with youth on provincial and international projects and provides evidence for the important connection between local and global rural communities. Further, she connects youth engagement with local political engagement, and emphasizes the political re-skilling that is highlighted in the literature (Epp, 2001). As she describes, "youth engagement is where youth are skilled politically to engage in political purpose in society and in a world and in community." She stresses that it comes from peers and is "youth for youth by youth." In her terms, youth themselves are educating each other and are making decisions about the formats and means in which that education happens. Much of that learning can be non-formal, but "youth actually have a full role in shaping their communities and in shaping the world." Especially in light of the fact that a large percentage of the world's population is youth, she insists that youth engagement is much more than putting one youth on a council. We need to really look at the role that youth play in their communities and societies. It is the education that comes from youth themselves, facilitated and supported by mentors. It may take non-traditional forms, but that is how engagement and education happens. When several participants spoke about being actively engaged with community decision-making as part of engagement, I wondered about the possibilities for how youth could become more politically skilled in community. Lucinda offered this perspective:

> I don't think youth councils are a bad idea but…I've been doing a lot of work in the organization I work for around water and water is a huge rural issue…I saw one example of a rural, not a rural but just a youth water council and so getting youth to be like intricately involved in the management of something like a resource like water in their community and having the…technical skills, the knowledge about that resource… But it's not just youth involved in the formal places where decisions happen but that they are really contributing, that they feel and that there is actually a place for them deciding what is happening in their community on every level whether it's recreational, whether it's about what's happening at their school, whether it's economic.

What then is the difference between participation and true engagement in community life? Lucinda described how youth may not see themselves as responsible or informed to make decisions. Through her workshops and rural

youth tours, they asked youth in 6 or 7 rural schools about their opinions on voting age. Should the voting age be lowered from 18 to 16? "And a lot of…70% of these youth said no, because that they didn't have the skills or the knowledge." She describes that as "kind of a scary thing because I see so many examples of amazing and brilliant youth from rural communities and from urban communities."

How then do you find the balance between inviting youth or encouraging youth to be involved in their own rural community as well as on a broader scale? With her work with local rural youth and rural youth internationally, Lucinda is attentive to the challenge of connecting to issues outside the community but also encouraging youth to respond to the local community around them. Lucinda sums up the connection as "always looking for opportunities for learning," and describes it as consistently "integrating the local and the global." She stresses that this means always integrating knowledge and looking at the root causes of issues. Whether it is "water or natural resources or participation," Lucinda suggests looking at the root causes and sharing different issues and solutions that come from rural communities locally and globally:

> ...I think some of the situations and the experiences that they will see in their rural community can correspond and relate and be seen globally. So I think it's making those connections and getting youth to really think of how does poverty look in my community, how does it look globally or what does drought look like in my community if that exists…and then [connect] those relationships.

Some examples of how to engage youth in these discussions are community mapping or analysis, and getting youth to look first at some of the issues that are happening in their own community, and then consider how they can make connections to the global world as Lucinda concludes, "they are inseparable."

The *Rural Roots Youth Action* community public engagement program is a contemporary example of challenging the next generation to think through issues of rural out-migration and complex interconnections with power and privilege, especially in relation to the Alberta oil sands development (Cavanagh, 2007). As

this quotation from a youth leader working with rural youth expresses, rural youth have a desire to engage in issues that impact their communities:

> My own experience growing up in a very small farming community has shaped my views, my values, and my life in ways I continue to realize. As one of the rural out-migration "statistics" I am a defender of rural livelihoods, youth opportunities in smaller areas, and basic resources for rural residents. I also firmly believe that solutions to rural problems will come from rural populations themselves. I am involved in this project because I feel it is absolutely necessary for youth to be exploring the issues of poverty, privilege, and power in rural areas (Tara, Rural Roots participant, 2007).

This stance provides evidence of the need for an investigation of power and privilege in rural communities. While there is hope and possibility in the next generation, it requires support for knowledge sharing to support development that is community-based. This approach will be limited, however, unless rural youth are informed of their wide range of options in terms of career and community life, and encouraged to develop skills to critically assess the costs and benefits of rural community development. In the next section I focus on the challenges and tensions that were presented in the findings.

Tensions and Challenges – Individual and Collective Identity

A key tenet of rural community membership is related to individual and collective identity. A challenge that is often mentioned was a lack of privacy. While a sense of connection adds a feeling of security, it can also be overwhelming. As Fiona described in an in-depth interview, people often know your business even if you do not realize they do. As Epp (2008) describes, "close knit" does not mean uncomplicated. Fiona provided background information in her interview that added depth to understanding some of the tensions that arise in community dynamics. These were opinions that may not have been shared in a dialogue process. As she explained, "I'm still the small girl that I was, and second, have grown up to be an adult. I've always been and will be this person." As she elaborates, it is hard to get a second chance, which is one of the biggest detriments to living in a small town, but she maintains that people can move beyond their past.

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While dialogue members mentioned the importance of family connections and names, in the interviews participants also described how important – and sometimes complicated- family connections and names can be. Along with the strengths of intergenerational relationships come the limitations of family members that may have "messed up" along the way, for which a rural community may have a long, unforgiving memory. While some interview participants spoke of needing to leave because they did not feel they could overcome these ways of being "placed" in their rural community, Fiona also provides an example of a woman who had faced some barriers growing up but decided to make a positive change in her life, and the community seemed willing to give her a chance to prove herself.

While the communities were generally supportive, young people did describe tensions in how they were perceived and challenges in developing their own identity as part of the rural community, but also as an individual with interests and opinions of their own.   For others, there is a lack of diversity or a sense of being alone or misunderstood. As Isabelle described, it was uncomfortable as a child because her interests were not the same as the majority of the people in her class. For example, they had horses, and the majority of the people in her school did not have horses, and did not understand their appeal, and "did not know why they were cool…now I see that as OK but at the time it was kind of a bummer sometimes to feel like I didn't have someone to relate to". This quotation emphasises the importance of belonging, and being seen as an individual as well as a part of the rural community.

Tensions and Challenges – Discourses of Decline and Despair

In an interview after the dialogues in Kitscoty, Daniel, an adult respondent, compared the small town where he grew up in the neighboring province, and the rural community in which he has chosen to raise his young family. His town had a population of 250 people and may be smaller now. Although there has been an influx of some people, or a "housing boom" with people coming from other provinces who "snapped up some property just on a whim in case things ever do take off" it is strictly a farming community now with no services:

> The hotel closed, the store closed, there is a kind of a seniors center that they can meet for coffee, and it's kind of dwindling too because there's just not enough people around to take care of it and keep it viable. So those kinds of communities are hurting, which is too bad to see. There is a need for it, the seniors enjoy getting out and things like that, but it's tough when you're really lacking people.

How do other communities compare with this sense of decline and loss of services? What is it about other rural communities that make people choose to stay? As Daniel explained, "I think a lot of it has to do with just being vibrant and being able to get work and have work, and have a sustainable career and that's the biggest thing." In order to move back to a place like the town in which he grew up, he theorizes, you would have to be an independent business person, or a trades person like a plumber carpenter. But then making money would be a challenge because there is "an old mentality, I'll pay you when I have money and that doesn't always cut it when you're…an established businessman and you've been around awhile. But for a young guy, it usually kills a lot of the young businesses because they have to pay their bills every 30 days." This position is important to my research because it provides evidence to illustrate that not all rural communities are seen as viable to young people. The economic question is intricately connected with other factors within the rural community, such as the social fabric and infrastructure or loss of essential services.

Daniel also speaks about the challenges of closures of local mills and towns dependent on a single industry. He maintains that you have to have variety, like his current rural community, where one of the spouses, female or male, "could find a job where earning a living is not a problem, and to be sustainable." For example, if one spouse wants to be a stay-at-home parent there are those options. As he described, there are tensions around moving back to another rural community: "We're doing really good and we've talked about moving back home numerous times and it's so darn tough because if you want to call it starvation-ism [sic] is a definite possibility, having to make a go of it, which is too bad but that's just the reality."

Many rural communities have agricultural roots but are now economically tied to industry. As Fiona explained, people with professions have the opportunity for

employment, and if you are close enough to a larger center you can live in the community and come home at night. In communities with a regional college, the college provides employment. For example, some of the participants worked on contracts with the local college, remain in a small community, and have flexibility as a young parent, too. In some cases the commute might be 25 or 30 kilometers but it only takes15 minutes, and as it was described, in a large city, that is considered a very short commuting distance. Along with the practical side of employment, what I noted in the dialogue participants was their resiliency and responsiveness. In this example, Daniel was able to see possibilities rather than barriers. These qualities would also be valuable in mentorship and supporting rural youth to engage and participate in rural community life.

The dialogues did not provide specific insight into the reality of remote communities because of the location of Kitscoty, but interviewed participants offered perspectives on the challenges of distance and commuting. Isabelle explained that distance can be isolating, especially in a remote community if you do not have a close social circle, while others felt that distance from a larger centre was less of a barrier than finding a community of people with similar values and who accept difference. Leah described the frustration starting in junior high and high school when she just wanted to be connected through social ties like shopping or hanging out with friends, "it got more and more frustrating when I couldn't drive yet and I wanted to go hang out with friends or just go into town for whatever reason and you can't 'cause it's too far away and you have to get a ride from your parents or something." However, some of the participants, like Gio, adapted to this reality, "I was the first person they'd pick up on the bus so it was like an hour long bus ride, but that's fine. I think that's part of the reason why I love music so much 'cause I listen to music on the bus." Other participants also describe long commutes for school or work in order to continue to live at home, primarily to save money. As Leah explains, "For the first couple of years I actually commuted from [the small town] every day to campus but by 3rd year I decided that was ridiculous 'cause I was spending so much time in the car, on the bus and I wanted that time to sleep or study, not sit on a bus…

There were also differences related to gender in terms of choices to stay, leave or return revealed in the interviews that were not as prominent in the dialogue discussion. One interview participant described that when her brother left it was a big blow to the family, but then her parents were more open to her choice to leave. As she explained, he was the oldest and made some decisions that her parents did not necessarily agree with, but he was really glad to be out of there. She remembers that was significant to her, even though she was quite young. By the time she was making decisions about her life, the norm was already set. Leaving was an option. However, he made a decision not to participate in the community even from away and not support the community. Further, he expressed to her that he felt it was not a healthy place to live, and that he was really happy that he was not there anymore. To add to the blow, he had also chosen not to farm. "I think not to farm, you know if he'd moved away and maybe farmed somewhere else that might have been very difficult to imagine but more acceptable" (Sarah). While leaving is a risk, several of the respondents also remarked that their parents did not prepare them with the practical skills to take over the family farm, and they often heard messages that indicated it was a difficult life choice. Not even a "career" but a choice of how to live on the land. While some expressed sadness about this, other sentiments expressed in the dialogues indicated that even if you inherited land and equipment, it was just too difficult given increased debt loads, mechanization, and the changing face of farming. The majority of women in the interviews spoke about children and family and many considered how gender might impact our sense of home. These differing expectations and roles could be explored further in future dialogues.

Engaging Youth and the Role of Mentorship

In my research questions I was interested in factors that enhance youth engagement. I include the following portion from the second dialogue night to further illustrate the dialogue process. I then elaborate on some key themes. This portion responded to the question: *Who is responsible for engaging youth?*

> Linda and Lila begin by proposing that adult coaches in the village are very good at getting youth and the teachers involved. [All agree].

Lila: They always work. One thing I recall telling everyone, if they complain about teachers, they are there for us; they cared if we did well. I want my children to come to Kitscoty because I know that the teachers here care. I can still say this to this day…

Linda: I think we have a shared responsibility, parents, school, and community, for inviting the kids to come out. And local government, who gives them the opportunity… and I mean municipal government, but also the boards who value their contribution and find it meaningful…I think it's a shared responsibility.

Grace: I think there is a lot, if you took an overall picture of grade 9-12, not everyone would win the award of citizen of the year, or be recognized at a community event, but they might be volunteering for the volleyball tournament, collecting bottles for the fundraiser, and then some of them are not, and they never ever will.

Lila: There's those who never do, and those that are on every committee, and busy every weekend, and I've seen that even when I left and came back. [She gives the example of her mother].

Linda: Did you know that growing up, or did you have to go out to learn that?

Lila: Well, I have a huge family. I had to go away to learn that. When they thought I was grown up was different when I knew…when I got married, that was part of it, and now I'm having a kid they are like, hey, you're an adult. It took until I was 25…having to work out my life, and how to finance it….It took going away, in some ways…To learn how to make it work, to pay for schooling, and rent.

Grace: It changes...

Lila: I'm going to be a mom, and I'm scared out of my mind. I'm not there yet.

Discussion between the three generations

Linda: You will. You will learn to trust yourself.

Grace: That's ok, it's normal. Seriously.

Linda: Good things come from family. Hockey, school sports, drama…It all contributes to who we are.

This exchange between three generations demonstrates how the participants are building a relationship of respect and rapport, which is significant as they begin to

face challenging issues. Examples of successes in engaging youth, and of previous challenges or struggle within the rural community show the fluid nature of dialogue to delve deeper into a real problem posed by the participants. Lila explained it to the other dialogue participants this way, the young people could explain what they want, and why, and give them a chance to understand…and then the adults could see what it was about and have a chance to say, "Well maybe you need to re-evaluate how this is presented…". Linda picked up the discussion here. "As I mentioned last time [about the skate park proposal], I feel that with a little bit of *mentorship* that group could have taken off." Grace provides the example of youth wanting a Tim Horton's coffee shop in the community, and emphasizes that sometimes there is a need for a reality check. Youth were asked their opinions in a series of meetings. They suggested that they wanted a Tim Horton's franchise in town, which was not considered by other community members to be a practical suggestion. This example and others provided in the dialogue demonstrate the grounded theory that is generated by community members based on their lived experiences. Because the example of the skate park was mentioned various times, it is fitting to provide more insight in the dialogue process with this example in mind when members suggest their own theories and provide ideas for solutions or approaches:

> Grace: Maybe this is where this would work. You go to local government and say, "we want a skate park" and they say, "well, we're sorry but that's going to cost _____dollars….

> Linda: Well, maybe if we think about it, out of those discussion maybe we should have said, "ok, you've got this idea" and then set them up with a couple of mentors. And then even if it doesn't go ahead, they've put some effort into it and would understand why. To this day, some of them still think that they just weren't heard. Maybe if they'd gone through part of the process they'd have understood that this is a *huge*, expensive undertaking…

> Lila: and I'm not saying anything bad about young people or anything, but sometimes they'll say, "but my mom…" well your mom and dad have worked so many years, and you don't just snap your fingers…where does this money come from, and this money come from. So you're able to sit there and go, "Ohh, so opening a Tim Horton's in Kitscoty is probably not going to happen, because it's going to cost money, plus. Who's going to run it, and who's going

to work there…that way they are able to – and it helps them to set up as adults and work through the process.

Grace: You're right, Linda, that could have been handled better. They could have sat down with a couple of members of village council and said, "Ok, why can't we have this"

Lila: Or even if those people were able to say, "We'll help you develop a business plan and draw up that business plan"

Linda: And sometimes we expect our youth to understand things that perhaps adults don't know. How many adults would be able to sit down and draw up a very good business plan? If they were able to sit down with people who have those skills and draw up and plan, and then see, if it's not realistic, at least they have the understanding of why?

What is notable is the way in which the older and younger generation addresses each other with critical questions, but with respect and inquiry rather than judgment. They provide examples and potential suggestions for how one might respond to a community problem. In this way the dialogue provides an example of theorizing that is generated from the community members themselves. The participants demonstrate that they are thinking through a range of solutions, from implementation to potential outcomes. I now consider how the dialogue process is a key to answer my research questions, specifically regarding youth migration.

Migration: Why Youth Stay, Leave and Return

Both adults and youth have proposed ideas about what makes a community welcoming and how members might be encouraged to participate. These experiences and potential strategies for engaging members respond to the question of why young people are leaving and what might encourage them to consider returning to a rural community. The following dialogue transcript from the first dialogue night is between an adult with three older sons, and two younger members. It provides a backdrop for discussing the research questions in greater depth. It begins with the response to a question about why youth may stay, leave, or return to the community:

Linda: I have to say, when I was done grade 12, I wanted to leave. When I was young, I wanted to leave, but I think that's a healthy thing – It's a really good

thing to go, if you choose to come back…If you want to go, see what's out there, and if you choose to come back, then it's a choice.

Mary: I couldn't wait to leave…it was like a countdown, I couldn't wait to go. I went away for 2 years, went to school for 2 years, but when I was ready to settle down, then I couldn't wait to come back.   To start my real life as I like to call it, and definitely I never even considered where else I would go…I just knew there is no other place I'd rather go. There was never any question.

Anna: And you see, I never had any desire to leave, ever. None of my friends went away. All of my friends were here, and my family. So I guess…I had no influence to want to leave at all. I was quite happy. Maybe it would have been different if …maybe if more of my friends had left it would have been different for me…

Mary: See, when I graduated, there wasn't really anyone who stayed. An enormous group went to the U of A, [University of Alberta]. Some of us went to Red Deer,

Anna: And the people that I went to high school with…no one went away…

Mary: What about this year's graduating class?

Linda: Well. My son is graduating this year and is already looking at U of C [University of Calgary]. I think many of them will go… I guess I say that based on…I've heard about their career plans, it involves going outside the community. In most cases it means going outside this area. I was shocked. Twenty nine kids out of that class had honours (Grade 11) a lot of these kids are going to go, but maybe they'll come back because they do have roots here. But is hard to say…

Mary: In my grad class, 75% left, and of that 75%, about 50% of those came back – It's probably [because of] family. And the accessibility of everything around here…family, and the tendency of the economy to be booming?

Linda: Our economy here is booming. We've had the odd recession, but even 2008, we weren't impacted like some places. They are confident that they can come back and make a good living. They can have a good job, earn good money…I don't think they feel they need to leave to find that.

Mary: I hate to generalize, but there seem to be quite a few teachers…or educated people working in the oil field, engineers, or other professions are accessible here. Even in my class of 32, there were 3 of us at the 10 year mark who were teaching at Lakeland College – we'd all moved back, and it's ironic, none of us…we were not trained to be teachers. I taught the Pharmaceutical Tech program, one was teaching the Electrical program…it's accessibility, too.

Lloyd's close, Vermillion…or if they have family background they take over the big family farm.

Zane: Are some coming back to family farms?

Linda: I think some are, and a lot of family farms will change with this generation (listing farms) Ours… this is where it will end. The 4th generation. There's nobody now to take over the farm…

Mary: A few girls will stay around with their husbands, but they take different paths, maybe vet [veterinarian]…

Anna: I don't see anyone taking over [the farm] after my dad, but maybe – no…I don't know. If I stay, maybe. We talk about maybe pursuing the farm someday. Maybe it's on the back burner? I don't know… it's all too far away… [Participants discuss commuting distance and farming].

Linda: The Registered Apprenticeship Program [RAP] is an option. I don't know how many are registered, but they have the opportunity to go to Lakeland college in Lloyd or Vermillion…the kids are registered in electrical, instrumentation, cosmetology, one in baking, heavy duty mechanic, welding, carpentry…what an opportunity!

Anna: It's more than academic, now. Anyone can work towards something that's needed, valued…and continue with school. I always heard that college or university was what counted. Now a trade opens up all those other options.

Linda: There's opportunities for night classes. I take them through the Faculty of Extension. It gives me the opportunity to stay in a rural community but still achieve my educational goals, even at my age [laughs], that's huge. I'm so lucky. I live in such a good time. Even the previous generation… they had to leave for that education. Whereas, I can go on [on-line] at night, and do my class.

There is a discussion here that it "Opens up spaces, but doesn't include everyone".

Linda: That's another bonus for living here. Being involved in local government. Do many people graduating from grade 12 see distance education as an option?

Anna: The younger generation wouldn't see that as the first option. They'd rather go…

Linda: And they're not tied down yet, they don't have those same commitments. For me, if it meant I had to leave here for my courses, I

wouldn't do it, because I still have a child in school. But when you're 18…you hear the stories of going away and college life. I think there are very few…

Anna: What they might do is upgrading so that they can go away for school.

Mary: I'd just hate to go back to school to take it again –or even get a class you'd wished you'd taken.

The participants talk about working during the day, and taking classes at night. They note that all of these factors contribute to that fact that "all things are accessible" or a 20 minute drive away. This rural community is different because it is not remote. As one dialogue participants puts it "...like you'd drive that in a city, anyway."

What kinds of events shape Kitscoty? What's going well?

Mary and Anna agree on the arena, community hall, and dinner theatre that "really pull it together" and anything with the school involved.

Linda: Movie night at Elementary school - What a success! It really brought the community together last winter.

Mary: I went last night to the Safe and Caring gym drop in – Zumba. It was incredible. First there was only 10 people, then 30 at the next one.

[Laughter] One of the participants pipes up "That was my suggestion. We were laughing the whole time. It was a blast. A great group of ladies. So good! It's hard work and just so fun" the group laughs and emphasizes the importance of having fun together.

Linda: I think those things are so important – get everyone out having fun together. It's important to get the work done, but also to have fun together. To do something in the evening and just laugh and have fun together.

Mary: And since the hall has come into the community – that's huge. All the fundraisers like the fireman's fundraiser, dance.   There are get togethers, and people have a blast. And you see people you haven't seen in a long time, and think I haven't seen them in a while and then you just have a ball. It's a great thing. Others slow down…

Is there anything you would change?

Linda: I know for myself, I'm a bit frustrated with the village that we don't finish what we start. It comes out of ACE [Active, Creative, Engaged communities] conversations. If we start something, we need to finish it off so

that we can proudly say it's done. Before starting something new. That's one of my frustrations.

The participants discuss the walking paths as an example and note that "hopefully they get finished. Families are riding bikes on it, and just loving it. People do see that there's stuff going on. It's a good idea."

Linda: I had company and I was getting excited about it. They didn't see it that way, but I said, when you're out there with maybe two or 3 kids in tow, plus maybe a dog, instead of vehicles flying by you, you're thankful for a walking path.

Mary: It's beautiful, you see piles of people, off the street. It's great. I'm totally looking forward to them.

What makes it a welcoming place?

Linda: That's interesting…there were some people who moved here a few years ago, and found it unwelcoming. I never thought of us as a clique-y community.

Mary: I know when we started in a sports team when our kids started…Some kids have already been in a group and others felt they were left out a bit, or weren't welcome.

One of the participants noted that in the Midgets sports league they went to some of the summer games and "either you mix with all the parents…otherwise you just stick to your own group…." As she reflects, "Naturally it happens that people get left out when you stick to your own group. I don't think it's intentional. It's just...you talk with those you know…"

Linda: Now that I've heard that, I'll make a conscious effort to make conversation with someone we don't know as well…

Mary: It was huge, it was very uncomfortable. Even at the end of the year there were still some groups that were first year, or new to community… [She talks about them being excluded].

Some of the participants find this surprising, but another member suggests that it "might be easier to be the new people and you could start fresh, not like, I know you from high school, but your kids are second year kids…"

Anna: It's very interesting... That might be why people find it unwelcoming – like people moving back after being away – being new…

One of the younger members comments about Facebook – "half people who friend me I see at arena, and they'd walk right past…"

In the next section, there are examples of deliberation and ideas for resolving conflict.

> Linda: If I was a director, I would purposely address that. Whatever it is – mix up booth shifts, make some conscious effort –get to know each other and make the effort. We're all good people. Maybe just being more aware.
>
> Mary: Yeah, like there were those who totally knew what was going on, with fundraisers and things, and those of us first years who didn't know that whole year what was happening. If you start late, too, it was stressful, I wasn't sure I wanted to do it again? Is it worth it?
>
> Linda: There are things that can be done

Another participant notes "My goal is never to be like that. Now we'll be those who can make a difference. You hear it about other communities. People get in their comfort zones and don't even notice it." One of the dialogue participant's interview responses adds to this discussion of what makes a community welcoming. She mentioned that those who left the community often did not have a close circle of friends there, and it was small enough that it could be "cliquey". Although this may not be a secret, these relationships with the potential to exclude others are tricky territory, and I would explore these in greater depth with a longer process of dialogue, with participants who had built a deep level of trust.

How do you make it more welcoming?

As the participants discuss the welcome wagon, Safe and Caring committee, and the Volunteer Sign up night, they deliberate about how an outsider might view those organized activities as ways of entering into community life. One participant considers, "When I think back to that night, I visited with people I knew… but how would an outsider see that? Is this kind of stuffy?" Participants agree that there are opportunities to stay connected, like the newsletter, and add, "When it's stopped for the last few months, I feel lost."

> Mary: Honestly, it really needs to happen [the newsletter]. Especially living out in the country, you get isolated. Or things happen at the school and I miss it. It's the newsletter that connects me. If it's late, I totally miss it.

Linda: I've been so involved in the school, that I tend to know what's going on in the community, but with my son graduating, I might be out of the loop. Will I still have those connections?

It does change, participants agree. One notes, "When I had kids, you get busy in your own house. Like you're in a tunnel. I like it here. I do like it here, but I like getting out too. There is value to a newsletter. I keep it pinned up and always know what's coming up…"

Mary: I can't imagine being a new person, but they would know what's going on with the newsletter, and could join it.

Linda: Membership seems to stay static. With the Safe and Caring committee there have been a few changes, but mostly stayed the same. Arena board, hall society, Ag [agricultural] society…they all meet in September. Maybe people don't feel welcome to join those boards once they are established for the year - we never get visitors or anyone new…

Mary: We never get anyone new, or visitors…

Anna: Or if we ever get someone new…if someone comes out, they don't come back again.

Linda: Are we unfriendly? [She laughs*]*

Group members recall an example from the first dialogue about the Centennial meeting, "…a guy came and said he was new in town, and never came back…"

Mary: Maybe he got busy with something else…but you wonder.

Linda: If you think of hall board…

Anna: I'm the youngest one by at least 30 years!

Linda: Good for you, bring your energy to it.

Mary: Yeah, I remember at the building of it, I thought – whoah, we're at the wrong place... and they're like ok, what are your thoughts…can you bring more youth out? What are we going to do? I'm not going to be able to do this, and they said, bring the others out and you have to do it, because you're young, and I thought ahh, you're pushing me out the door already! [Laughs].

Linda: We have to be careful not to do that.

This dialogue offers rich content for exploring the emerging themes and responding to research questions about engagement and youth migration, and queries that other scholars have posed about the potential for return (Looker, 2001; Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000). Two key elements that might draw young people away, at least for a period of time, were education and employment. What unfolds throughout a dialogue is a discussion about moving away, and returning to the rural community. There is a sharp contrast in being involved in a rural community versus focusing on studies or career in a larger center. One participant explained that before she moved away she was very involved in civic life. For example, in high school her parents and brothers were also very involved so she had the support of her family in her volunteer pursuits. But moving to an urban environment changes things, Lila explained. She postulates that there is a difference in "those who stayed, and those who left and came back." Is there a difference? Grace, a senior member of the dialogue, suggests that urban life might be more segregated, with work in one part of the city, sports, and childcare in other areas. In a small town the community needs may be more evident. Grace also shares her knowledge about how life might be different across generations. As she described, when we were talking about the varied age groups, there are differences in ability and interests as children grow and family dynamics change. She has four grown children, and grandchildren and believes that after a while "…maybe you come back to family again." She also notes that seniors may want less civic responsibility and more time with grandchildren.

This brings us back to the point about who is included and excluded in community life, and who participates. Is there local pressure to be involved? Does this change across the generations? How does this impact rural community sustainability? The participants laugh about a posting on the post office that the hockey rink is looking for workers, but they also provide the insight that young people are not necessarily busier than an older generation. Grace muses that busyness might be related to how careers are organized today and relates back to a previous conversation around this topic and the subject of economics. Lila, the youngest member of the dialogue offers another perspective describing how she worked in an office and worked longer hours than her boss. She felt that she was

viewed as "the younger person…the one who doesn't have kids…" What is notable is how the conversation then shifts to open spaces for comparing experiences across generations. The older member asked about Linda's experiences, drawing on her previous knowledge of how priorities shift and change. Trust and rapport is evident throughout the dialogue exchange. I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the views across generations by listening to this process of communication. In the following sections I examine these ideas in greater detail.

Youth Engagement and Participation

Dialogue has the potential to engage participants in conversations that directly address a local concern. For example, youth participation and engagement is often perceived to be missing in rural communities. How is this phenomena experienced in the Kitscoty context? The group dives into a discussion related to the question, "Are youth participating in community life?" All agree that they are helping with coaching and there is a high percentage of young people volunteering in schools, tournaments, leadership, and putting on dances. The Terry Fox run is noted as a community event that really connects the school and broader community. They all agree that young people volunteer, but maybe are less involved around age 18-23, when "they are in school, concentrating on studies, or gone." One participant suggests that once they complete their education, they will come back. They agree that it is important to engage the high school age youth and young generation. When asked "Who is responsible for engaging youth?" the participants cite adult coaches and teachers. They note that the coaches and teachers are always there for the youth. Linda reminds us that it is a shared responsibility including parents, school, community inviting the kids to come out, local government, and the municipality. It is up to adults to value their contribution and find it meaningful. In her words, it is a shared responsibility. Participants agree that sometimes you need to leave the community to realize what you have, and how you can be involved. Lila offers insight into the connections between staying, leaving, and potential for learning. She claims she had to go away to learn important life lessons. As she shares her experience the older members listen attentively to every word. Through a discussion about making money

for living and rent, it is clear that these factors do matter. There are responsibilities beyond being at home. What develops at this point is a discussion between three generations about trust, family, and a sense of home and identity.

Engagement and participation were central themes in the dialogues. For example, Fiona's experience, compared with her sister who has moved to a rural community with a different dynamic, highlights the importance of engagement. As she explains it, by volunteering 15 hours for minor hockey or other local events, "you are required to give your time, but…you create a cohort of people that have a strong bond and some commonality."   Once again solidarity and agency come to the fore. Others echoed the importance of engagement as contributing and investing, in essence, being part of a collective beyond individual needs. Engagement is part of understanding that you are part of a larger whole, and that you can make a contribution as an important community member.

In contrast to these experiences, Daniel describes some of the challenges of living in a "bedroom community". Despite close-knit, with many resources and excellent schools, there is still a sense of transience for those who live in the rural community but commute to larger centers for work. They "come and go and it's tough to get them involved into things." However, when people do get involved, "they usually bring somebody with them…so that's kind of a bonus. It's just, you just got to get them in… lure them in" Daniel has a formula for those who have the "gumption" to be involved:

> I'm a firm believer in shut the TV off and get outside and meet your neighbours, and find out who's involved in your community…that is the best way to do it. It's tough for some; they're wrapped up with friends who work and different things like that so lots of times they don't have time to do things in their community…that's part of it. But for the most part I think once they all get involved, they enjoy it.

While he admits that a few volunteers come and go with various commitments, there is a positive side of multiple initiatives that meet everybody's needs. Daniel's perspective summarizes the views of many participants. They verify that, for youth and adults to participate in community life, they must be engaged in the rural context in a way that suits their stage of life and their individual interests. For example,

Daniel described being part of the daycare board and decision-making processes while having young children, and others stressed being part of sports associations as youth, or as parents of young kids. With these variables in place, many respondents indicated their willingness and interest to be involved, and are more engaged in the process and outcomes of community initiatives.

Anna, a youth leader, notes that modeling positive comments about the community and trying to be a positive role model for young people sends a powerful message. She hopes that her presence influences them and that they realize that people in their community care about them and value them as part of the community. She describes engagement in concrete terms:

> To me it means having youth show up at your events. Having them want to be a part of your group if you ask them. Because I don't feel, not very many youth will just come up and, they won't just show up at a meeting, often they have to be asked to show, to come, or be invited to come to a meeting and the youth. There's a few youth that are good, if you do ask them they will come and share their input at them. So, just having them involved and respecting their opinions and what they have to say…is youth engagement to me.

Anna also reveals some additional views about youth involvement in her interview that add depth to this discussion. She fears that those who choose to participate are always the ones who volunteer, and will continue to be the few that are involved in everything. In contrast, she feels that if youth feel that their voices are not heard the first time "they try" or the first time they participate in an event, they are very reluctant to return. It is important to mention here that a number of the survey responses provided a sharp contrast to the openness with which the dialogue participants in Kitscoty engaged in the process. Although many of the survey responses provided suggestions to engage youth and enthusiasm to try, some presented more jaded (perhaps realistic, or based on previous experiences) that the youth would feel they had to "prove themselves" in order to be heard, and even then, despite promises, their opinions were never weighed as heavily as those of adults. These findings emphasize that in order to be effective, dialogue can be seen as an invitation or investment to participate. Trust is critical, with time and commitment to build relationships.

Participation and volunteerism through initiatives such as sports teams or social events, was critical to building a sense of belonging and engaging with the rural community. Other participants mentioned the uniquely rural opportunity of curling events, or other sporting events. Participants explained that one of the factors that makes Kitscoty a healthy and strong community is the school sports programs. As Fiona described if people don't feel welcomed they also need to volunteer right away. "They're gonna jump in feet first. For example a new family moves to the community and their son or daughter plays hockey, the first thing they have to do maybe is work a weekend booth shift, right? Welcome or not, they're involved in the community, because volunteers are what makes this community rotate." These volunteer roles also help to solidify social connections and links between generations.

As Marcia, a woman who lived in Kitscoty for 35 years and is a key stakeholder, described in an in-depth interview, "Basically it's a much friendlier place [laughs] than if a person lived in a big city". She explained that in contrast to her high school and university years in Edmonton, in the rural community "basically everybody knows your name." She describes it this way, "People get to know each other and you make social connections. That would be a big thing about staying in the area, and lots of opportunities too. So there's the social connection, but lots of opportunities for things like volunteer work and making a difference." She notes that it might be easier sometimes in a smaller community to get involved in various causes and volunteering... As an example, she describes a social action group, SADD - Students Against Drinking and Driving – and opportunities to get involved in different projects and sponsoring events, a church youth group that is very active, scouting program, youth playing in bands or "garage bands." …Youth groups, Scouts, and 4-H, "Those are probably the big three that attract young people outside of sports. And of course there are community sports like lacrosse, hockey and ball". With a sense of belonging comes both responsibility or "expectation" and a sense of membership. As Fiona expressed in an interview after the dialogues, you need to be involved because it provides a sense of belonging, and people need to belong.

Intergenerational Connections

Quotations and examples from participants poignantly illustrate the importance of intergenerational ties. Fiona describes the connections between generations, including her young daughter, mother, and grandmother, this way "they're important, and I think they're strong." Fiona describes an image of four generations in a home economics lab, as part of a girls' club baking night:

> Last year the leader wanted them to learn how to make pies, and I'm a baker, but I'm not a pie baker, I like to bake, and so I asked my mom, who is 62 and my grandma, who is 84, and they came in and taught the young girls how to bake pies. So of course we come with our aprons and everything, because that's what we're baking in, and rolling pins. The next week we taught them how to do cinnamon twists and the girls came with aprons and rolling pins, just like my mom and my grandma and I had.

Anna described how her grandma went to school in the community so she really enjoys hearing stories about when she went to school and comparing what is the same and what is different. "I guess it just helps build that bond." This example of strengthening bonds between the generations demonstrates how memorable these connections are for the younger and older community members. However, in an interview, one of the youth dialogue members also cautioned against losing the trust of youth in the community if groups (especially adults) did not listen to them or take them seriously. She gave the example of bringing a young friend to a meeting:

> I finally got her to come to a meeting with me and she was sharing her ideas, and she was really excited about them, and they kind of didn't really listen to her, they kind of ignored her, and it was really discouraging for her. And I pointed out to them that when youth come to these meetings we really need to appreciate their ideas and listen to what they are saying, because it can be discouraging if they are feeling very excited about something and then their ideas kind of don't get listened to. They don't really want to come back and nobody really commented on that, they kind of said, oh yeah, and then they just moved on from what I said. So in some ways they, like I think they're very positive towards the youth but I don't think they really always respect what they say.

When asked about her perspective about youth more generally, she explained some of the tensions that exist because they may or may not feel that their opinions or ideas matter she noted that they say that they want them to matter, but "…I have found in my experience when it comes down to it, they kind of end up doing what they want to do anyways. And that's not in all the groups, [some are]

really, really good, as for kind of getting everybody's different ideas and really considering youth in them." This perspective was shared by a few survey respondents who questioned whether or not adults would listen to the opinions of youth.

In order to improve these relationships, the dialogue participant offered this advice, "I think if they really listened and kind of acted on what the youth are saying... Because they are intelligent…they have valuable opinions. I really wish that they [adults] would take what they say a little more seriously I guess." Other dialogue members stressed that focusing on commitment, values, and accountability with both youth and adult community members was the key to community engagement.

Ideally, during times of tension or conflict in the community, members can draw on these connecting points and build on these relationships. Intergenerational dialogue can also help to develop these long-term connections and supports. The importance of education and schools in the rural community was evident in the dialogues, and these schools were also spaces for dialogue and intergenerational connections to occur. I discuss rural education policy in the following section.

Rural Education and Policy

As the dialogue unfolded, participants demonstrated how a dialogue could enrich a discussion related to rural education practice and policy. They emphasize that, through the school district, there are options and opportunities. For example, students from other nearby towns may choose Kitscoty because they have a good basketball program. "You can find what you need" Grace is convinced. The conversation about schooling and options relates directly to some of the data in the interviews. What is important in the dialogue process is that these conversations are happening, and it is clear that the roles of the parents, coaches, and teachers matter. Lila describes her experience with school when teachers are supporting local and relevant curriculum. You can "explore and figure out what you want". This exploration and support for considering a range of options is critical for rural youth to make informed choices, and for rural educators to support their learning.

While some participants noted that the options might be limited for students in academic classes, when schedules are full, other participants discussed how teachers are essential to assist when students are struggling and how they might offer guidance to support students. There may also be competing priorities, such as band and hockey academy. I wonder what life paths are encouraged and what types of messages young people hear about whether or not to stay, leave, or return. Is this path fluid? The interview quotations I included in Chapter 6 also allow us to delve deeper into the tensions that exist with the various choices and priorities. These are underscored by the choices for both social and geographical mobility. Education and employment are important, but as this dialogue process demonstrates, they are balanced with involvement in local community life, and a complex range of opportunities that may involve staying, leaving, or returning.

To illustrate myriad paths for young people and the range of decisions that ensue, I highlight an example provided in the dialogue of the option to study at a rural institution, such as Lakeland College. First, there are choices of whether or not to pursue post-secondary education, and the subsequent questions of *where, when* and *how* (and of course, *what*). Studying in the area, at Lakeland College, was provided by the dialogue participants as a popular choice for local youth. Because of the proximity of this college to the rural community, Lakeland provides an opportunity to live at home or in residence or independently outside the rural community. The educational programs offered range from trades apprenticeships to agriculture, education, business and professional courses. These programs prepare students for work that can be based in a rural or urban community. What are the messages that young people hear about these choices? The connection between education and employment pursuits is directly related to rural community through intersections with the social, cultural, political, environmental and global aspects of community life. Through the dialogue process some of the factors that may impact youth decisions to stay in the rural community were discussed, while some questions remain unanswered. Regional colleges were cited as examples of options for youth to stay in or near the rural community.

Regional Opportunities and Distance Education

Educational and employment opportunities at regional colleges were mentioned frequently in the interviews and dialogues. They are a key factor in staying in or returning to a rural community. As Diana described, she had no problems finding a job when she came back after her second degree because she was willing to work in Onion Lake. Although it was 40 minutes North of the closest larger center, she felt it was not too far to commute. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Recreation Leisure Administration and a Bachelor of Education after degree. Diana has worked on the reservation and at Lakeland College. She teaches in the Human Services program, including Early Learning and Childcare, the Child and Youth Care Worker program and Educational Assistant programs. As she explains, the rural kids like it, especially the Vermillion campus because if they have a horse, they have a place to keep it. They can still have their animals and keep those connections with their farm background. This is important because young people can maintain a rural lifestyle and pursue post-secondary education that is relevant to their interests and the rural context.

The option of on-line education received mixed reviews, but local colleges received overwhelming compliments. This finding is particularly interesting given the prominence of discussion about the challenges and opportunities for advanced education in rural Alberta (Advanced Education, 2005; 2011). Lakeland College in Lloydminster and Vermillion are examples of colleges that have grown in service and credibility. As participants from Kitscoty explained, a lot of the people in that community see these colleges as a viable option. Even if they are university bound, academic credits can be transferred and that is more common that it was even 5 years ago. Fiona explained Lakeland now offers a Bachelor of Commerce degree. "It's becoming more and more of a choice, so to speak, because they're able to live at home". There are examples of friends that have gone to the city, and been overwhelmed, come home, went to college, or chose a different route. Diana verifies that it is a great option for those who want to remain in the rural community, and there are limitless options available at nearby colleges. Linda, a participant with older sons, has taken many on-line courses in administration and governance. She sees this

option as an opportunity to continue working and learning. Although on-line learning does not offer a simple solution to youth out-migration, and education and employment are just two factors, it does open possibilities for staying or returning.

These findings from the dialogue process demonstrate how an intergenerational dialogue can contribute to co-creating theory and sharing knowledge about issues at a local community and provincial level, such as providing insight into options for post-secondary education that are relevant to the rural context. Throughout the dialogue process it was clear that the way in which the participants communicated across generations was going to be a key factor in responding to my research questions. For example, dialogue participants provided important insights about factors that impact rural outmigration, and what implications these had for rural community education and community development. Here is an example of responses generated through dialogue:

What options are youth choosing these days after high school?

> Lila: I just read an article that 20% of males are dropping out and more females are going to university. They don't learn the same way girls learn. I can understand that. I can sit down at a desk and teacher can dictate notes. That's how it is for my younger brother. He needs a more hands-on approach. If they'd said, you need to change the way you're teaching our children to not be only one way. We need teachers who recognize that we learn in different ways… [This leads to discussion about the Registered Apprenticeship Program and credits towards trades while still in school.]

> Grace: Typically here kids finish high school. We have a very high percentage that finish high school considering how small the village is it is. And we have Lakeland College here and many students go there.

> Linda: Some live at home and some in residence. Some of each. I know that when our boy went they stayed one year at home and lived one year in residence.

> Lila: The boys who do graduate seem to be more vocational…and less are going to university so eventually all these baby boomers are going to leave and we'll have very female dominated professions. It's not like our boys aren't smart enough.

Linda: It'll be interesting to follow up with that. When the boys hit their 20s, will that be when they choose to go to university.

Lila: Males tend to go vocational. Well, I saw lots of men in university and they went towards business or finance, you didn't see many of them in the general arts or HR. Some of my classes I didn't have any males because they couldn't grasp how it was taught. I went to my math teacher and said, "You're not helping me learn math, and they said, well you're just not smart…and I'm like, "no…men…my husband would be the first to say he learns differently than I do."

Linda: You worked in the library…how many boys did you see in there reading?

Grace: In my family, my boys loved books.

Linda: Mine too. If we put the books away it would be devastating, you might as well…

It would be a different world. [Discussion of male and female expectations and how males learn differently].

Lila: I watched my brother struggle through Heavy Duty Mechanics reading. [Here participants talk about reading between generations: Grandparents, children and grandchildren.]

Linda: For the size of our school we have a high percentage of students who go away for school and high rate of honours students. They can go away and pursue the career that they want.

As Lila emphasized, there is a need for teachers who recognize the different learning needs of students. This focus on relevant rural education, attentive to ways of engaging young people, is consistent with Corbett's (2008) work with rural education and youth migration. Grace offers a contrast which is illustrated throughout the dialogue process: "typically here kids finish high school…" The importance of rural institutions for providing regional educational and employment opportunities is evident in many of the interviews. Rural young people have options to live at home and or in the college residence. This allows them to save money and remain involved in rural community life. Regional educational institutes also offer employment, as I discuss later.

Gender Considerations

Another important element evident in the dialogue is a perceived gender difference in educational pursuits among rural youth. Participants emphasize that males tend to focus on vocational options, while more women are considering university Dialogue members speculate that it would be interesting to follow up on this.

The discussion falls into an easy banter about differences between how men and women learn. Importance of family and different choices - related perhaps to gender - deepen the discussion, and spark a vigorous discussion about reading between generations, including grandparents, parents, children and grandchildren. It is agreed that for the size of the school, there is a high percentage of students who go to university and high rate of honours students. As Linda notes, "They have options. They can go away and pursue the career that they want". Previously, I looked closely at the idea of "options" and opportunity. Relationships and something as simple as love also play key roles. As Diana described, "some ended up marrying people from here, like met their significant others that still live here so that's why they came back." Some participants spoke about shifting gender roles and expectations over the years. As Fiona explained, her mother grew up in the age where she did very well in school but financially, as the oldest of 6 children, living on a small farm, she did not have the opportunity to pursue post-secondary schooling. She always talked to her children about their futures:

> …you will get something; you need to have something in your life, some form post-secondary schooling. I don't think she ever really wanted us to leave, but I'm not sure if she expected us to stay. I think ideally, out of the three girls, I'm the one that's here. My sister was here also. Her job took her away. I have another sister in Wetaskiwin. But her husband owns a business… If something ever happened, she had said…she would move back here. This is home for her.

This poignant reference to home illustrates the rural community as the very backbone of the family. Some people travel far to find home, but this is home for her. An opportunity to pursue post-secondary education while maintaining connections to home was mentioned in dialogue and interviews. I elaborate on how this discussion informs rural education policy and some of the implications for rural educators in my final chapter.

Exploring Questions of Rural Youth Mobility

The intergenerational dialogues illuminated key aspects of my research questions, namely, ways to engage with youth in rural communities, how to strengthen rural community networks, how communication between youth and adults might lead to a deeper understanding of the factors that impact youth engagement and youth migration or mobility. Despite the conviction expressed in the dialogue about the importance of rural community life and the strengths of local assets like an exemplary education system and dedicated teachers, there is a sharp contrast with those who wanted to leave and those who were comfortable to stay. While some participants spoke of leaving as a healthy desire, others always knew that they would stay. As Mary notes, "it's a healthy thing - go, see what's out there, and if you choose to come back, then it's a choice," and another participant, Fiona, echoes this with the sentiment "I couldn't wait to leave -- it was like a countdown" but adds that things changed when she was ready to settle down. In sharp contrast there is the voice of one who "never had any desire to leave, ever. None of my friends went away. I was quite happy. Maybe if more of my friends had left it would have been different for me…" The range of options are described in the dialogue, some went to universities in urban centers, while others stayed closer to attend a college nearby. When asked about the next generation, and this year's graduating class, participants mentioned that they think many of them will go. As Linda, (also a parent with a child graduating from grade 12) noted, many have career plans that include social and geographic mobility – most plan to go outside the community to for education, employment or experience – but there is hope for return. Many will go, "but maybe they'll come back."

Carr and Kefalas (2009) provide provocative insight into the ways in which educators prepare leavers for social and academic success, while stayers insist that education should provide concrete skills needed in their working lives, rather than "irrelevant, abstract academics" (p. 138). Like many small towns, often resources are focused on those who leave, not these who stay or return. What is significant is that these scholars demonstrate the impact of rural outmigration on the social fabric, but see the possibilities of community leaders and models of

civic engagement that actively resist the decline of rural communities, or hollowing out of America. These efforts to understand how to reverse the rural brain drain and engage youth in rural communities, are relevant to the Canadian context, and Alberta, in this study, to avoid "sowing the seeds of our own decline" (p. 139).

The dialogues offered formal and anecdotal insight on youth engagement and mobility. For example, dialogue participants offer some hard numbers based on informal assessment. For example, Mary claims that in her graduating class, 75% left, but then about 50% of those came back for various reasons: accessibility, family, and an economic boom. She offers these insights with a speculative tone, and phrases it like a lingering question. This tone is an important part of the dialogue. The audio recordings provide fodder for follow-up interviews with dialogue participants. What does it mean that even as they speak about some of the reasons for returning, there are undertones of further questioning? I pose, based on the dialogues, that there are numerous and at times conflicting opportunities. The decisions are multi-faceted. Further, this community is not facing economic struggles; yet economic reasons to stay, leave and return are a piece of the puzzle. Although the community has experienced recessions in the past, it has not been impacted by economic recession like other rural communities. In sharp contrast, participants in the survey and many in-depth interviews with participants from other rural communities indicated that economic pressures were a struggle in their community. A voice from the survey stands out in my mind: "without good work, every community sucks". In Kitscoty, dialogue participants spoke about the local economy with optimism and stated that people seem confident that they can come back and make a good living. Though many of the jobs available in town are in service and retail. Participants concluded that teachers and formally educated people choose to live in the community because of the lifestyle and lower cost of living. Those who work in the oil field can access their work from the community. Others can work at Lakeland College. Although they were not trained to be teachers, the college was accessible and an option for both education and future employment. What

does this mean for the local community? In contrast to many other small communities, Kitscoty has a wealth of educational and employment options immediately available to local young people. However, the connection to the community goes beyond that, and as the participants note, many still leave but cite family or social connections to the community. Factors such as friends returning, decisions to have families of their own, and a desire to be near grandparents, nature, and exceptional schools were cited as reasons to return. Is there a stronger link, then, to agriculture or the family farm? In the dialogue it is noted that some are coming back to family farm, but many might also have a registered trade certificate or an off-farm income to support this "lifestyle". "Lifestyle" is a term some participants used to describe the rural community life and the language they use is a new way to explore rural identity and discourse.

In contrast, in the interviews with participants from other rural communities, some youth mentioned crushing economic conditions or the amount of confidence it takes to begin something entrepreneurial when everyone in town knows you and can see if you succeed or fail. As they explained, you are not anonymous, and nor will you be able to please people or avoid criticism. Opening that part of your life to public scrutiny - positive or negative – is a risk. Many participants knew of one or two local business, for example, Elle has a cousin who started a dance studio, and others mentioned local stores or a woman who started a gym in her garage. One example of a limitation to the local economy and innovative ideas was a young man who is starting a local pharmacy in the rural community, but facing disapproval, while safe or "approved" choices might include setting up a scrapbooking company or selling Christian literature. Sarah notes that it might be "fairly acceptable, as long as it fits in, but if you're really innovative, it might be supported in principle, but you may not get the kind of support you need to be really brave and sustain that." Several people commented that with initiatives like small scale farming, or farmers' markets, small rural areas may join together with larger centres to have a more thriving market, while ironically, others did not want to purchase food from people they knew or "open themselves up to criticism" about pricing or people saying they could do it better or at a lower price. Other farmers' markets were run by older ladies in the

community and might require a commitment from the next generation to see it continue. It was suggested that there is more of a culture of roadside stands and purchasing from people in Manitoba or Quebec, while it may be seen as "going against the grain" in many communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan. These experiences add another way of thinking about current research that explores farmers' markets and rural agriculture (Wittman, Beckie, and Hergesheimer, 2012). I laugh now when I read her words, but one interview participant was very serious when she stated, "If I was doing a market analysis, I'd say it's the wrong place to do it." Obviously local support, or at least curiosity and openness are critical if rural young people are interested in starting and sustaining their own business or working collectively with others in the rural community.

The in-depth interviews with dialogue participants also revealed opinions that may not have been shared in the dialogue setting, but provided another view into the phenomena of youth engagement and migration:

> I just think they're so busy trying to find themselves that they don't realize the value of being involved. I wouldn't say they're as involved as someone that's 23 or 24. It seems like that age between 18 and 22, that college, university era is when they kind of realize what's important to them in finding themselves. You have some families that are involved, some young kids like 18 year olds that are involved, but if you look back their parents are very involved, and so that's been their life. And a lot of those kids have been in 4-H, or Scouts or volunteer through the church, so that's always been part of their life. Other kids that aren't involved that may become involved, like [a young woman in the community] I think she's just at the age in her life where she's going to college and she's got a boyfriend, and a job and so she's just trying to do all of that and be 18…

She describes how maybe this stage is a little more selfish, but shifts in thinking and willingness to participate may come with time or a different stage of life. This reflection from a young community member who has chosen to return offers unique insight. I turn now to a more detailed analysis of the dialogues.

Analysis: Connecting Dialogues to Theory

Solidarity and agency are important underpinnings to knowledge sharing, and Bhattachararyya (2004) claims that these elements are foundations to community development. In response to my research question: How can an intergenerational

dialogue enhance our understanding of the factors that influence rural youth migration? Dialogue in a rural community creates an opportunity to explore issues, enhance solidarity, agency, and a more equal balance of power among the participants. Dialogue provides a way for participants to experience these elements first-hand. For example, as the dialogues unfolded there was wistfulness at times, and indicators that memories were being shared and trust was building within the dialogue team. Evidence is seen in the risks taken by participants in expressing wishes or regrets, or questions about alternate paths. Exploring options is a significant part of the discussion and dialogue process.

Public engagement and risk, commitment, and empathy are recognized by Kent and Taylor (2002) as central tenets of dialogue. Although I facilitated the process by bringing participants together, dialogue members are considered equal in their participation. Dialogue within a rural community involves a process of listening and learning through exchange, and therefore dialogue has the power to include, rather than exclude members in rural community life. Dialogue is active, interactive, and engaged (Bruning, Dials, and Shirka, 2008). I now examine the themes and tensions that emerged from the two dialogues I facilitated in the rural Alberta community, and in turn, consider how these findings from the intergenerational dialogues contribute to shared knowledge that can enhance our understanding of local issues and potential responses. I highlight three key areas 1) Sense of Community; including engagement, 2) Social Capital; and 3) Conscientization.

Sense of Community

Many participants spoke about a "sense of community" in the informal conversation surrounding the dialogues, and often related this to their perception of "belonging". The dialogues reflect the four elements of a sense of community postulated by McMillan and Chavis (1986), and the community dialogues provide insight into four areas including 1) membership, 2) influence, 3) integration and 4) fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. In the dialogues, participants most often referenced their sense of community or membership through participation in voluntary activities. These activities contributed to the fabric of rural community life, such as school parent council, Safe and Caring Communities, Agricultural Board,

church leadership, recreational teams such as minor hockey league, contributing at the local Seniors' Centre, new day care board, or town events such as building the community hall, playground at the local school, or fundraising dinners.

The participants in Carr and Kefalas' (2009) study, similar to the interview participants in my study, provide evidence that rural people view rural places as worth defending, and they make a case that urban populations should care, because they are positively affected by healthy rural communities, or conversely, by rural demise. A decline in rural populations and infrastructure is connected to our food systems, resources and transportation routes, while disintegration of a social fabric also impacts civic engagement that can inform local action and shape a culture that is distinct. In addition, the erosion of community gatherings and events impacts our human connections with others, and displaces our sense of responsibility (Putnam (2007). In other words, engagement plays an important role in shaping the society in which we want to live. Agency that is expressed in participation, contributes to a sense of collective purpose, social contracts or cohesion, and decision making. Survey participants explained, for example, that they would be willing to contribute by volunteering or participating in local events if they felt connected to the community and the project, or if they were asked to contribute their talents or ideas.

Local recreational opportunities and safety for young families were themes mentioned often by dialogue participants. Through this process of participation and engagement they expressed shared concern for the community and a sense of contribution. Though many avenues for shared connections and integration were mentioned as examples, a question emerges from this discussion: who is left out and who is included in the various boards and committees? Respondents seemed unanimous in their assertion that if people did not feel that they had influence in their community, perhaps they were not getting involved. Do newcomers feel that they are welcome to be involved? On this point dialogue members generate theory about how people might feel left out of the process, and how this might be addressed by inviting newcomers to participate in the future.

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Attachment

Attachment was a clear theme in the dialogues. It was demonstrated in the connections that dialogue participants identified as important to them: attachment to place, to family, to the land, the local school and certain community groups. An understanding of attachment helps to recognize and respond to what might keep rural young people in a community, or what connections might draw them back. While many members mentioned an attachment to family, others noted the importance of their connections with local community groups and a more specific tie to the community as a member. Membership and belonging were often demonstrated through participating in civic life through volunteering. Attachment to place and the landscape was also noted, through examples such as volunteering to help build the local playground, building new walking trails, or growing up on a farm. Attachment in the dialogue process was related to connections to people in the rural community, and the connections that the dialogue participants had to the rural community as a place.

Civic Engagement

Many of the participants described their connection to the rural community through participation in community life. What factors impact youth engagement in the community? In what ways might these factors enhance or inhibit youth engagement? What are the messages, (real or perceived), that youth receive about staying and participating in the daily economic, social, political and cultural life in their community? Often engagement with rural community life involved service, which may involve work, but often demonstrates a deep volunteer commitment. This volunteer experience in the community was described by many participants as a milieu that felt familiar, sometimes an extension of how they were raised by their parents, or in how they are parenting their own children in rural Alberta. They also noted the drive to contribute to other families. It is here where the dialogue opens up a space to share knowledge between generations, and understanding the perspectives across the age divide. For example, one member speaks of the different age groups by explaining that her perspective is framed by the fact that she has four grown

children, and grandchildren to consider when she takes on other community commitments.

Other participants weighed the potential benefits of being involved with various activities, to themselves and their families. The dialogue participants explored how some younger volunteers now bring their children to meetings because of the rising cost of child care. This scenario demonstrates the commitment to civic engagement and volunteering on the one hand, as well as the more subtle challenges and barriers to engagement and volunteering through an honest exploration across the generations. While the content is important to understand some of the supports and barriers that might exist for rural community members who wish to participate in community life, the process and context of this discussion across generations is of key interest in understanding how knowledge is shared. What I observed in the dialogue process is that there was an interest in what each of the members had to say, and the opportunity for each member to speak. This is reflected in the literature on dialogue as a set of key assumptions about the dialogue process. As Vella (2004) explains, the dialogue process assumes that participants are prepared to work hard and work together, and that participants come into the process to learn with abundant life experience to share. There is an underlying assumption of trust and honesty that deepens as safety is established and participants take the time to reflect.

Participation – Strengthening Solidarity and Agency

Participation in community activities was emphasized by participants in the dialogue as an essential part of their lives. Through their descriptions of giving back and strengthening the local community, participants highlighted key points of engagement and commitment, such as volunteering on the local agricultural boards, starting a local day care, and organizing winter camps for youth. This participation took the form of a shared vision, challenging my own ideas and much of the literature that speaks of the stark fact that rural populations are diminishing and disengaged. Populations may be smaller, but the commitment to place, and a vision for the future is bold. These were true examples of Bhattachararyya's (2004) vision of solidarity and agency as cornerstones of community development. The Safe and Caring community initiative, is an example that illustrates a long-term view of the resiliency

that can and will take root in a rural community, while the local parents groups demonstrate their vision for the future through the theoretical plans and strategies combined with practice – hours of labour to build the playground and fundraise for drama and sports. As illustrated in the dialogues, forms of participation can be formal, for example through committees or as sports coaches or executive members on Boards of Directors, or less formal through contributing to a fundraising event for the local music program or opportunities to help serve dinner for a local community event.

Tensions

Tensions were also expressed in the dialogues. At times these were internal tensions, such as youth decisions whether to stay or go, and sometimes they were within community groups or between generations. These tensions are important because in dialogue it is crucial to explore difficult conversations rather than to avoid them. There was room for participants to explain their positions or ask more questions from a position of curiosity rather than to shut down the conversation. In some cases, in-depth interviews with the participants offered insight that they may not have shared in the dialogue setting. For example, in an interview with one of the youth dialogue participants, a potential challenge with rural life emerged in her words, in a small town"you're targeted you're targeted and I don't know how forgiving people are... I don't have a targeted, I don't think, last name, but there are [people] here that are well to do, and if you're that person, and if you're last name is that person… then is there special treatment…Do people perceive you a little bit different, I think so. I'm not going to turn a blind eye to that..." These contributions added different levels of relationships in the community, forms of capital, and understanding that the dialogues alone would not have revealed.

The exploration that participants demonstrated in the dialogues is consistent with the theory of an effective dialogue process that includes preparation for building trust, reciprocal communication about issues that are important to members, and strengthening bonds for further deliberation or exchange of ideas and possible solutions. Although dialogue participants named competing priorities or tensions in the example of their family farm, or decisions to stay or return, there was opportunity

to express and responds to some of the sadness expressed. It was also considered that in this rural community, there are options and increasing supports for youth who choose to stay, leave, or return.

Building Social Capital

The dialogue provided insight into the local networks and forms of capital within the rural community, as well as bridging beyond the community in some cases to strengthen the rural area through connections with other rural communities. One example of bridging that was expressed was how the local youth workers combine forces with youth resiliency workers in other small communities to organize activities to support rural youth. Another interesting phenomenon of the dialogue process is the ability to pose problems and discuss them between and across generations, and thus bridge potential divides. The dialogue process in this study illustrates the power of community to pose additional questions and enact agency (Freire (1973), such as the example that some sports teams or organizations may create an atmosphere that some senior members "know the ropes" perhaps inadvertently excluding newer members from participation.

While it is debatable if this is a subtle form of exclusion and therefore an oppressive move on the part of the members with the power, or if it is simply a matter of uninformed exclusion, the reality is that senior members have the knowledge, and therefore power in this "club", while other members want to be included. Viewing civic participation from this angle makes it clearer that knowledge and power are always at play, and creates possibilities of shifting this dynamic to be more equal. There is the possibility of change, and the agents were around the table actively participating in the dialogue. On initial view it may appear that it is "only a game" and there were dialogue members who immediately sought to listen and offer ways to rectify the situation, but the roots of these complex dynamics lie deeper within the fabric community.

Conscientization and Potential for Deeper Analysis

Participants in the dialogue exemplified the power of a shift in awareness that you "know what you know." When asked how community members might respond if

youth requested the local Seniors' Centre as a Youth Centre, participants revealed that the youth who came to town council several years ago with a request for a skate park may have benefited from mentorship. It is this recognition, beginning directly with a realization by a participant in the dialogue process, expressed across generations, and then understood and validated by a senior participant and youth participant, that has the potential to have an impact in future community planning. This evidence of the process of conscientization begins with and for community members right where they are in their context at this moment in time. It may mean going against popular perception in the future to express this new understanding to the other leaders (both formal and informal leaders) within the community, but the first steps and a conscious shift has occurred. That may be the first step towards a change in the way youth proposals are viewed by town council. A more radical step might be to involve more young people on village council and move towards a model of shared knowledge and decision-making, where young people are full participants in the process. The dialogue was an example of shared participation across generations.

As the dialogues that I included in the previous sections illustrate, intergenerational dialogues offer new insights in response to my research questions. The intergenerational dialogues provided a venue for shifts in thinking to occur, what I referred to as conscientization. For example, dialogue participants demonstrated a shift in thinking as they explored the ideas of participating and sharing perspectives between various ages. As members exchanged ideas and discussed their positions about the reality and future of farming, for example, it was evident that the dialogue process has immense potential to delve further into these important topics. This would be especially valuable to explore in subsequent dialogue groups, but the semi-structured interviews also allowed me to probe these points. The importance of triangulation in my methodology became evident to me at this point. First the survey and interviews provided insight into how to structure the dialogues. Then, although the dialogue process provided insight into the issues and the process, I was able to clarify questions and seek individual opinions in the follow-up interviews with the dialogue participants. However, the power of the dialogue process was in the

amalgamation of collective and individual responses, and questions directly posed by the participants. For example, dialogue members held different perspectives on the future of family farms, given their various backgrounds. While several noted that they think a lot of family farms will change with this generation, participants also demonstrated their in-depth local knowledge of the issue as they listed farms and names of children that may or may not take over the farm.

As one dialogue exchange demonstrates, participants are concerned about the future of rural communities, despite many successes in engaging youth and adults. For example, when Linda reflects that there is no one now to take over the farm, there is shared concern that the family farm will end with this fourth generation. Another younger participant, Jill, is currently involved in the family farm. These differing points of view or positions of dialogue participants offer insight into how a dialogical approach can illuminate and challenge our understanding of the rural issues with a clear explanation of context and lived experiences. Within the process was a space to consider the interconnectedness of rural community life between social, environmental, economic, and cultural factors. Agriculture and the dying concept of the "family farm" is one key example of these intersections.

In a similar vein, interview participants mentioned symptoms or signs of a rural community that may indicate if it is healthy or unhealthy, while experiencing other rural communities (as a guest or visitor) that did not have that same sense of decline. Sometimes this connects back to rural economics and the challenges of living in an area where the population is decreasing. As Sarah describes, this really impacts the local population and it shows, "I remember being worried about it even when I was little, about kind of the town dying and about you know losing funds and all of those kind of things so that's very significant to me". She described her concerns about money, even as a very young child, and gave a poignant example of praying for rain. But equally important, she describes openness and a sense of giving that is required to create a healthy community, and Sarah suggests what might be viewed as a paradigm shift in order for her rural community to heal:

> I think even though people say that they want sort of youth in the community, that they want young people, that they want kids to go to the schools, that they want different businesses, that they want all that stuff, I think they're pretty happy in their kind of cycle of despair in some ways because I think it would require a significant shift of kind of acceptance and openness to strangeness and so I think that if someone came in and thought exactly like they did and participated in the community in exactly the way that they felt that they should that they would be happy, but if it was anything where they would have to give anything…like give even just a little, I think that right now there's kind of enough of…the community isn't healthy enough that they would be incapable of doing that.

This shift that Sarah mentions provides evidence that a way of communicating these feelings and important solutions or ideas between generations is a critical step. What she is suggesting is a critical reflection on what is currently happening in her rural community, while she has a vision for what could be possible. This example of conscientization, and offers a glimmer of hope for the way that youth and adults could address or change these "cycles of despair" together. A limitation, of course, is time, and the dialogue is shaped by who is participating and the context. The interviews offered evidence from other rural communities that there are similar patterns, but very different contexts and circumstances that shape the communities. As a researcher, I was privy to these insights, but I was not involved in how the dialogue unfolded. The findings and analysis of the interview data add depth and insight.

Reciprocal Communication between Generations

When I return to my central research question that explores how youth and adults might engage in an intergenerational dialogue to deepen the understanding of the issue, it is imperative that youth are at the heart of the dialogue, but also this design extends beyond the work of other theorists and adds to the field of research on dialogue as a process because it focuses on a *reciprocal* relationship to begin to understand the issues and ensure that multiple voices are heard. In this study I am not offering a prescriptive solution to rural community development, but the dialogues demonstrate that participants can get at a solution and find ways to explore community-based questions and contribute their knowledge and experiences as they consider options. These dialogues provide some evidence

that this approach can work. Kitscoty is an example of a community that was developed through local involvement and engagement. Although its successes and challenges are unique, other rural communities could achieve the same by fostering these levels of engagement. For example, survey responses indicated that many youth who have left rural communities felt strong connections to the rural landscape and environment. Kitscoty has worked with community members of all ages to build walking trails and parks. This commitment to strengthening connections between generations, and to the environment, demonstrates a method to engage the community and build healthy communities - a place where youth would like to return. As I maintained in my previous chapter, the research questions provided an entry point to understand the dynamics that impact the identities and choices of rural youth. The objective was to explore and then analyse how and in what ways that intergenerational dialogue may increase our understanding of the factors that impact participation and the role that dialogue may have on youth engagement in the rural community. Participants offered key ideas, such as the potential for mentorship and partnership between youth and adults.

I extend this discussion further by acknowledging that there are limits to the process of dialogue, and that power imbalances and inequities do exist in rural communities. This is an important thread to interrogate in practical ways, such as approaching the interview protocol with sensitivity and recognizing that these conversations are more than words and an interest in others' experiences. With a commitment to co-constructing knowledge together, I take steps to create space for action to occur, but it is vital that I am not directing this potential action on their behalf. There is also recognition that this may mean stepping out of a comfort zone, and there may be limits to what is possible within the confines of this research study. The on-going challenge is to ground research and action in theory, and recognize this work as preparing soil for growth and change that comes through the process of learning together. Further, this theory informs research methodology and approaches to rural community education and development so that youth and adults feel safe to

speak their truths, honouring the integrity and power of these voices. The process of dialogue stems from this premise.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented the data from my dialogues and organized it into categories and themes. In response to my central research question I asserted that an intergenerational dialogue framework provides a safe, inclusive forum for multiple voices, ages, and perspectives to be heard. Thus, an intergenerational dialogue enhances our understanding of the factors that influence rural youth migration by creating space for youth and adults to explore local issues together. Through the dialogue process, participants talked about factors that impact youth engagement in the community. They highlighted supportive relationships and networks, and a sense of identity and belonging that are consistent with social capital and sense of community. Further, participants expressed factors that enhance or inhibit youth engagement, such as mentorship, and welcoming and inclusive volunteer opportunities. I discussed these findings by holding them up to the theories that provide the foundation for this study. In the next chapter I refine the analysis and consider the implications for adult education and rural community development. I build a framework to support rural community members to engage and communicate across generations.

Chapter 7 – Building a Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue

In the previous chapters I discussed and analyzed the data from the dialogues, interviews, and surveys. That analysis now forms the basis for an intergenerational community development framework that can be applied in other communities that are experiencing out-migration, or other rural communities seeking new ways to strengthen their community through engaging youth and adults.

Throughout this dissertation, I have described a research and learning process that is both political and creative. It involves engagement and analysis of the lived experience of the participants as subjects actively constructing meaning in their own lives. In other words, as a researcher, I am co-creating knowledge with the research participants. This research process is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as *constructivist-interpretive*. As an interpretive researcher, I accept that research is not value-free, that the observer makes a difference to the observed, and that 'reality' is a human construct; I explored perspectives and shared meanings to develop insights into issues such as rural out-migration (Wellington, 2000, p. 16). This foundational belief that youth are agents in constructing and interpreting meaning in their own lives, and have important insights into rural issues that impact policy, provides the theoretical underpinnings to position youth and adults as co-constructors of theory along with the researcher. Therefore, building a framework to engage in dialogue and truly listen to the stories, contextual challenges, and lived experiences of the youth and adult participants is a critical step to address barriers that obstruct *seeing* and *hearing* the lives of youth (such as the social and economic barriers youth face in rural communities). Youth and adults together are central components to affect long-term social, economic, and political change. This theoretical position informed my research questions and underpins the participative methods used in this study. Now, this theoretical position provides a foundation for a community development framework with co-constructing and co-interpretation at the core.

The process and outcomes from the dialogues build a case for a framework for community development. Social capital and sense of community were evident in analysis of the dialogues. The practical application of these theories, or *praxis*, was

highlighted by dialogue participants and has been illustrated in previous studies (Corbett, 2007; Looker, 2001; Wotherspoon, 1998). Thus, there is an urgent need for a new form of dialogue to communicate between generations to understand youth migration, to offer alternatives to rural youth out-migration, and to enhance opportunities for youth to engage and find their place and *their community* in a rural context. In the previous chapter, the data from the dialogues provide a strong case for a framework to continue this inquiry. One final example illustrates this from the participants' view.

Many respondents spoke about hubs in the community, and where you might see the real positive and challenging side of rural life, such as the hockey arena or coffee shop. It is notable that these places within the community where people gather and often volunteer together were also mentioned to be where you might hear the real exchanges take place. I am thinking of these meeting places, based on the interviews and surveys, as where one might hear the "dialogue of community life" rich with ideas, argument, supporting evidence, discussion of local problems, and potential alternatives to local issues. Although the dialogues were the most obvious examples of a true exchange between generations and community members, other interviews provided examples of role models within the rural communities or opportunities for connecting within faith communities or organized activities where dialogue and learning can occur. For example, one key stakeholder provided the example of a rural outreach program that she used to mentor youth who coordinate a youth weekend and opportunities for young people to express their opinions and ideas about local issues. This example highlights the need for dialogue that connects youth to youth, with mentorship, but also includes youth and adults in conversations. This opportunity for mentorship also illustrates the importance of working together with joint decision-making power within their community. A framework for dialogue provides a systematic approach for mentorship and collaboration.

It is clear that developing new theories and original research addressing not just why young people stay, leave, or return to rural communities, but how we might best respond is crucial. These results from the interviews and surveys extend this query and existing theory to understand the root causes and connections of factors that

enable or inhibit youth engagement in rural communities. The next step is to continue this exploration and co-creating theory in dialogue between youth and adults in rural communities. The connection between these generations in a new form of dialogue about how rural youth perceive their sense of community, their "home," their networks, and their place in the community is essential to this research that aims to explore factors influencing youth migration, support rural communities, and counter rural youth out-migration.

Building on Adult Learning and Pedagogical Foundations

An intergenerational dialogue has the potential to illuminate inequalities and imbalances in power, authority, gender, and social structures while it frames social issues in historical and political contexts. For example, the dialogue highlighting the youth in the rural community who wanted a youth center provided participants with an opportunity to explore the issue across age, authority, and social structures within their community, while questions of family farm or oil industry development probe deeper questions about land and stewardship. While I focused on local rural areas in Alberta, this research has broader global relevance. Although this study is not focused primarily on critical theory, Lindlof and Taylor's (2002) explanation of postmodern critical theory underscores the importance of this research that is attentive to historical and cultural context and helps to frame theory and practice that is attentive to place and rural context.

My theoretical framework highlighted the need for an educational model that creates spaces for an analysis of power and concepts of authority. Starting with the belief that the wisdom of scholars and farmers is equally valid, a nonformal educational approach, built on adult education principles that I included in my dialogue chapter, provided a strong rationale for including community members in my methodology, and now to develop a framework that includes community members as key agents. An intergenerational approach provides a platform on which to base discussions with rural youth and adults and as Schugurensky (2006) asserts, question notions of education for civic engagement and social justice.   Throughout the dialogue process, participants demonstrated readiness to challenge assumptions

and to engage in critical dialogue combining ideas, action, and further reflection. An intergenerational dialogue framework combines theory with action that inevitably reinforces agency and can lead to new ways of thinking, acting, and reflecting.

Designing a dialogue framework to work with youth and adults in a reciprocal process of learning together requires an understanding of theory about engagement to unpack the various ways that youth may have been engaged or inhibited in a process in the past, and how to most effectively approach engagement with youth and adults together in a rural community context. A key component of this intergenerational dialogue framework is that it involves youth and adult or senior community members. The ranges of perspectives on issues that impact all community members are important to understand the interconnected nature of rural community assets and challenge. As emphasized in the research findings, youth are individuals as well as community members, not just "youth" as a group lumped together as an entity.

Participation from all sectors and ages is important. In this way, intergenerational dialogue is purposeful and represents a unique contribution to the field of adult education and community development. Adults and elders (these may include Aboriginal Elders or in the case of this research study, senior, non-native community leaders) have a unique depth of 'lived experience' to share with the younger generation. This discussion is prominently articulated by Burton and Point (2006) through their emphasis on the role of non-formal, experiential mentoring and storytelling, and "grassroots activism… result[ing] in community development programs, such as leadership training and consciousness-raising" in the histories of Aboriginal adult education in Canada (p. 44).

To extend this learning more broadly, intergenerational wisdoms are demonstrated in the major role that adult leaders like the *Raging Grannies* have played in shaping creative, non-formal education and our political history in Canada (Roy, 2004). The long-term value of an intergenerational dialogue framework to communicate at the community level addresses the role articulated in the literature for the inclusive, equitable, transformative, and sustainable nature of adult education. In addition, it has the capacity to mobilize rural community members to organize on

their own with direct applications for the design of rural community development policy to address a holistic vision of rural health that includes learning and employment opportunities for rural youth. As discussed previously in the review of relevant literature, employment and education are often cited as reasons that young people leave rural areas, and rural youth are asking for mentorship opportunities. Thus, an adult education and intergenerational dialogue approach to address this barrier is highly relevant in a rural context (Canadian Rural Partnership 2002; 2004; Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000).

Current research in the field of adult education provides concrete examples of democratic, participatory and critical education approaches to apply in rural communities to explore ways to contribute to healthy social and economic community development. For example, Chovanec (2006) and Foss' (2006) literature on critical health literacy in action at the community level has direct application for building healthy rural communities and intergenerational networks. Their example of critical health literacy reinforces that current policies and practices do not address social inequalities and existing structures and they call for people to have more control over their lives through community participation, learner involvement, and empowerment (p. 218-225). This community participation, so critical in the literature, is central to my research framework.

Adult learning discourse emphasizes storytelling, popular education techniques and collective biographies to examine learners' and workers' roles to analyze and power relations. An adult education approach also supports consciousness-raising and action at a community level (Fenwick, 2006, p.195). My intergenerational dialogue framework builds on these elements. Scholars' emphasis on challenging assumptions and recognizing the role of adult education to "support individual, social, and political actions to improve individual and community capacity to act on various social and economic [and environmental] determinants of health," (Nutbeam, 2000) provides a theoretical foundation to support an intergenerational framework to build a holistic understanding of rural communities.

A review of previous work in adult education supports an intergenerational dialogue beginning with research built on adult education principles, rooted in the community. An intergenerational dialogue approach provides a context to begin important conversations about local community experiences. The importance of inclusion and open-ended questions are prominently articulated in the research of scholars such as Hall and Clover (2006), to see communities as intrinsically connected, struggling against larger forces of capitalism and globalization, and a "cultural, political, feminist, economic, race, workplace, youth, [elder], global, human and local issue" (2006 p. 250-259). This framework offers a way to ask important question in dialogue: What factors motivate or hinder active community participation? What messages (real and perceived) do younger generations receive from the older generation, and how do these messages impact participation?

Based on adult education strategies, there is support for exploring ideas from the "lived experience" of community members to examine methods to counter the negative impact of out-migration on the health and sustainability of rural communities. Concrete examples of these issues include youth unemployment and closures of schools, health centers, and loss of family farms, as well as lack of community-based leadership and control over local natural resources. Although the literature from the rural secretariat and other youth studies (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000) speaks about education and employment, there has not been a research study to work together between generations to examine factors promoting and limiting participation in rural communities, exploring practical links between accesses to resources and training, social structures, economy, environment (natural and human) and rural-out migration.

The potential importance and impact of an intergenerational dialogue is emphasized by Clover's argument that, "…through imagination, dialogue, and debate, people can reassert their visions and work towards a more just, equitable, and sustainable life [or community]…" (2006, p. 258). Drawing on adult education theory in my research, a key component of the framework is to present and hear the "story" or narrative of a rural community through facts about rural out-migration statistics and narratives. By exploring intergenerational dialogue and cooperative

initiatives as innovative solutions to address issues such as youth engagement and employment, my research aims to open spaces to discuss options to address the existing gaps. This opportunity and space for discussion is critical to support a learning process and time to explore a range of possible future scenarios. Butterwick and Dawson (2006) explore the limits and possibilities of the "patterns of meaning" involved in the process of learning which invite new possibilities for understanding (p.282). As the literature and discourse emphasize, when examining solutions, the questions remain: solutions are 'alternatives' to what? Why do these structures exist in the first place? Who is included in leadership and decision-making, and who benefits? These questions guide a reflective process in my research.

Elements of an Intergenerational Dialogue Framework

As I described in previous chapters, the seven elements of my conceptual framework were foundational to examine and explain the findings from my study. These seven elements, 1) Sense of Community; 2) Social Capital; 3) Engagement; 4) Dialogue; 5) Conscientization; 6) Power and Privilege; and 7) Context, now help to form the components of my Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue.

The first and second elements, Sense of Community and Social Capital, provide a firm foundation and basis for the dialogue process. Those two elements set the stage for the key elements of Engagement, which encompasses partnership and participation. The elements of Social Capital, Sense of Community, and Conscientization set the stage for a reciprocal exchange of shared knowledge and decision-making, while the fourth element, dialogue, is at the very heart of the process. In order to understand power and privilege, the sixth element, both youth and adults need to be part of the dialogue process. The framework is attentive to context, the seventh element. The first and third elements contribute to the very core of the framework. Data from this study support a community development model that engages youth and adults together in problem-posing and community-based solutions. The next section explains how I develop the intergenerational framework in four sections. First, I explain the rationale for a critical orientation and emphasize the connections to pedagogical foundations of nonformal and adult education. I then

explain the interpretive-constructivist foundations of this model, and I conclude this chapter with the significance of this research to policy and practice.

My study uses dialogue to examine the ways in which youth and adults understand and respond to the factors that influence their experience in a rural community. These factors include youth migration, participation and engagement.

Figure 7.1: Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue
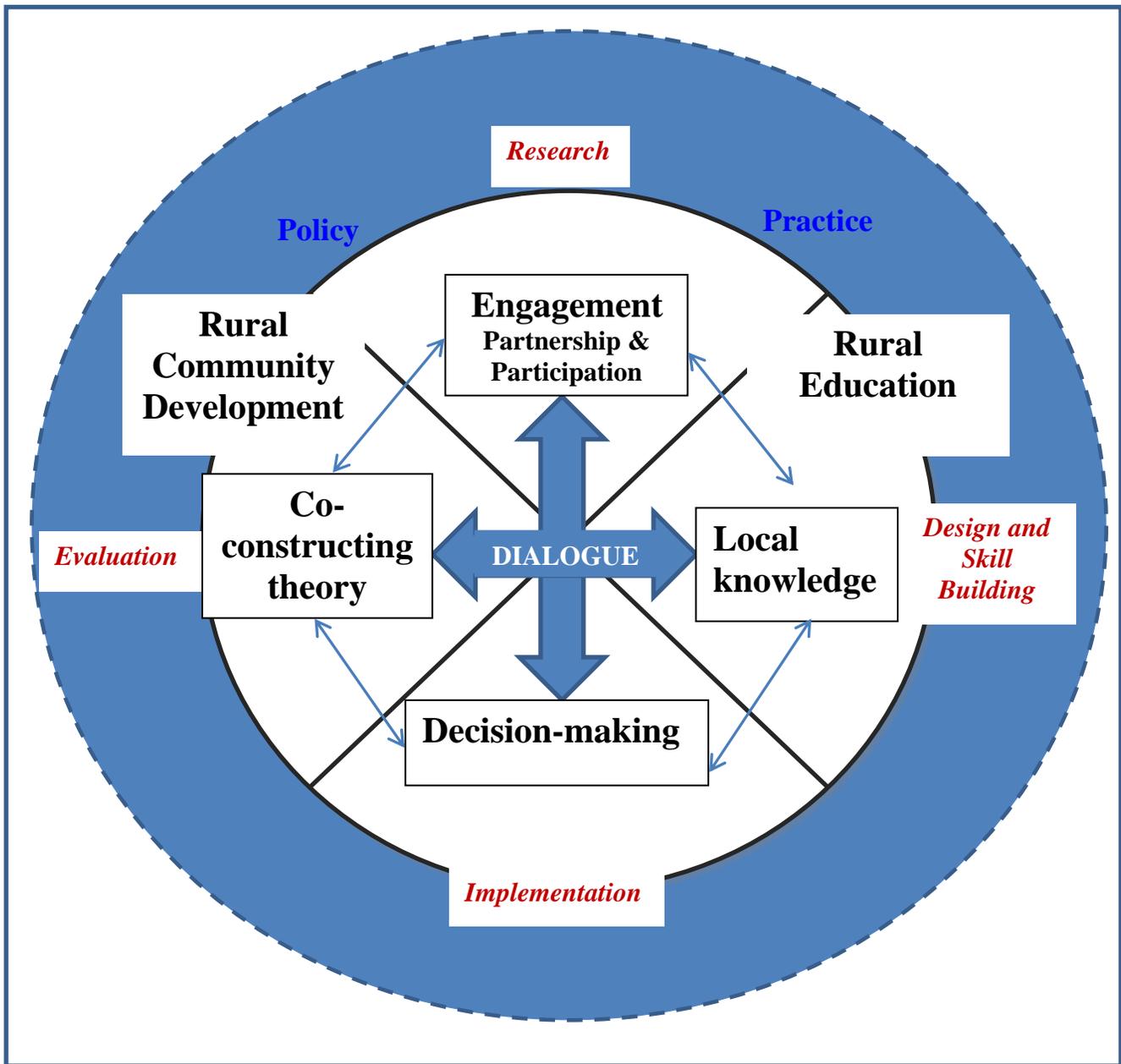
An intergenerational dialogue framework offers a method to explore a range of community-based questions. This framework, as depicted on figure 8.1 above, helps to understand the factors that influence youth migration, and how these factors promote or limit youth engagement in rural communities and impact rural out-migration. To respond to the existing gaps in the research, my study provides a community based approach that is attentive to local knowledge. The research develops an intergenerational, inter-sectoral framework that encourages engagement and calls attention to the complex problem of youth migration.

This framework is built with dialogue between youth and adults at the core, and the process combines 4 key elements that dialogue participants in this study demonstrated as part of the process and the outcomes of an intergenerational dialogue. These elements are: 1) partnership, 2) sharing local knowledge, 3) co-constructing theory, and 4) decision-making. Along the axis social, economic, environmental and political factors intersect. An on-going cycle is generated that is consistent with Rist's (2001) policy cycle of research and information sharing, skill-building, implementation, and evaluation. The framework ultimately has potential to impact action and policy in two key areas, 1) Rural Education; 2) Rural Community Development. I will describe each of the elements of the *Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue* in turn:

1.   Engagement – Participation and Partnership – Dialogue participants in my study illustrated the importance of engagement and participation to strengthen rural communities. As I mentioned previously, the literature calls for engagement and suggests mentorship as a way to respond to rural out-migration (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2002). Further, scholars illustrate the need for rural education that is highly relevant to rural community members (Azano, 2011; Sherman and Sage, 2011) and attentive to context. A key part of the engagement element is true participation and partnership between generations, as Dagnino (2009) and Freechild Organization (2010) assert. As dialogue participants in this study demonstrated,

intergenerational dialogue can contribute to discussion about issues that directly impact lived experience, and set the tone for reciprocal communication.

2.   **Local Knowledges** – In this study, dialogue participants shared their knowledge and the history of the community and illustrated this element of sharing local knowledge through their stories and experiences. Rural community members have a deep understanding of the rural community as a "place" with social, political, cultural, and environmental significance. Through sharing their memories of local events, older community members help shape a sense of the community's roots and purpose, while a younger generation offers a unique perspective on events that shape their experience and understanding of what it means to belong or be excluded from rural community life. This exchange adds an authenticity to understanding rural communities from the perspective of people who live in a place and understand the culture. Rural community development policy often refers to "capacity building" and knowledge sharing. The intergenerational dialogue framework offers a conceptual resource for how this process can be organized in structure, and sincere in its intent. As the dialogue transcripts demonstrate, the process facilitates a true exchange. Both adult and youth participants illustrate active listening and questioning, valuing the input from each of the generations.

3.   **Decision-making** – The focal point of my study's dialogue process was to learn about my research questions with community members by sharing their stories, lived experiences, and viewpoints across generations. This part of the process can build a foundation of trust for further engagement. Although I was not aiming to solve a specific issue within the rural community, evidence of relationship building and trust was illustrated through the dialogue process. An example of this rapport was when participants began problem-posing and brainstorming possible responses to problems in the rural community, such as how to support youth proposals to town council or how to be more inclusive to volunteers who are contributing to the local sports teams. Decision-making or other forms of action are a potential outcome, and can be a long-term goal of the dialogue process.

4.   Co-constructing Theory – The fourth element of the Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue is building theory that is grounded in lived experiences of both youth and adults. Dialogue participants showed their capacity for co-constructing theory as they brain-stormed how an older generation might mentor and support youth preparing a business plan to back a proposal generated by the younger community members. Through the process of sharing in an environment in which all members are encouraged to participate, dialogue participants in this study began to fill in some of the gaps between the roots of the problem of rural youth out-migration, the existing theory, why the problem persists, and a range of possible responses. For example, the dialogue participants identified that participating and volunteering in community life was a central part of feeling that they belonged. Some of the participants shared insights into how they felt about staying, leaving, or returning to the community, and the importance of connections such as family and the local schools. Older dialogue participants recognized ways that they might also mentor and support youth engagement in the community, and encourage the younger generation to take initiative. This theorizing about the issues and range of responses shows a capacity for identifying and exploring possible solutions to local issues.

The elements of engagement, knowledge-sharing, decision-making, and co-constructing theory are dynamic, illustrated with arrows. These four elements contribute to a four-step cycle that reflects a level of participation and engagement that is consistent with the adult education principles (Mündel, 2002) that I highlighted in my theoretical chapter. These four elements are: 1) research or information gathering, 2) skill-building, 3) implementation, and 4) evaluation. This cyclical process is informed by the adult education cycle of reflection and action, reflection, and further action. It often begins at the top of the circle with the first element, but adults or youth can enter the cycle at any point. The cycle is continuous, and there is a double loop, illustrated on the framework as a dotted line. This double loop is significant because it is through in-depth analysis, or continuing to ask questions "how" and "why" that rural community members can build capacity in their own community. The potential impact that the dialogue process has on the broader community is demonstrated with a hatched-circle extending outward to include

policy and practice. Rural community development and rural education are part of this potential sphere of influence that can be explored and informed through intergenerational dialogue.

The potential impact of an intergenerational dialogue framework was illustrated in this study through the dialogue process in the rural community. By talking about life in rural communities, and the elements that truly have an impact on their lives in the intergenerational dialogue, study participants generated energy and talked about local issues in a guttural, emotional way that demonstrated their knowledge, passion, and power. As I described in the previous chapter, they shared stories of assets, community dynamics, and issues in the rural community. They spoke with conviction about topics as deep and wide-ranging as their schools, community events, local food system development, limits and possibilities of the family farm, future generations, oil, hockey, Zumba, the local arena, a profound sense of family and rural history, and what it means to be "safe and caring." They explained powerful partnerships within the community and what motivates them to be involved. The participants demonstrated for me, beyond theory, the importance of connecting with people, a sense of place and a sense of community. This process of grounding the theory - rooting it in experience and in the rural context was essential to my research process. Participants explained and theorized about why young people might stay or leave, and more importantly, how to strengthen a sense of community and belonging.

My research and the dialogue process gained energy and focus as they captured what they loved about the community and landscapes in rural Alberta. They spoke about the people and the place; faith and identity. Meaningful exchanges were taking place. This is what social analysis can look like. Further, these youth and adults have ideas for rural education practice and policy. In fact, this is how relevant curriculum can and will be developed. Meaningful exchanges are already taking place in the gas station, the arena, the safe and caring meetings, and the coffee shop. What I am proposing with the Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue is to build on the elements of my original conceptual framework that stressed a sense of community. I want to create a place and a focused method for youth and adults to gather and to

engage further in this meaningful discourse. As the findings from this study indicate, communicating across generations contributes to strengthening rural communities.

In this framework, youth and adults are involved with the entire educational and policy process, including research, design and skill building, implementation and evaluation. By sharing knowledge across generations, they participate as genuine partners in decision making, co-constructing theory and deciding on practical approaches to local issues. The strength of this framework is that the elements are based on real experiences found within the rural community. It can serve as an initial blueprint for dialogues in other communities. With this framework, learning from local communities can be extended to consider the broader impact of decisions and actions. It is possible to use the framework to develop a dialogue that identifies community-determined goals and strategies to achieve their objectives. This process helps to communicate across generations about issues that matter. It can also be used to identify supports and barriers or threats as community members work toward successful policy and practice.

An intergenerational dialogue is at the heart of rural community development for the purpose of increasing youth engagement and strengthening ties between generations. I have conceptualized a rural community development model (see figure 8.2 below) that includes economic, social, political and environmental elements. This model illustrates the overlap between four key elements of people and place reflected in the literature and findings as crucial to a sense of community and a sense of membership or belonging. As well, the elements of identity and attachment, highlighted in previous results chapters, are present. The model situates intergenerational dialogue at the core to illustrate its significance.

Figure 7.2: Rural Community Development Model
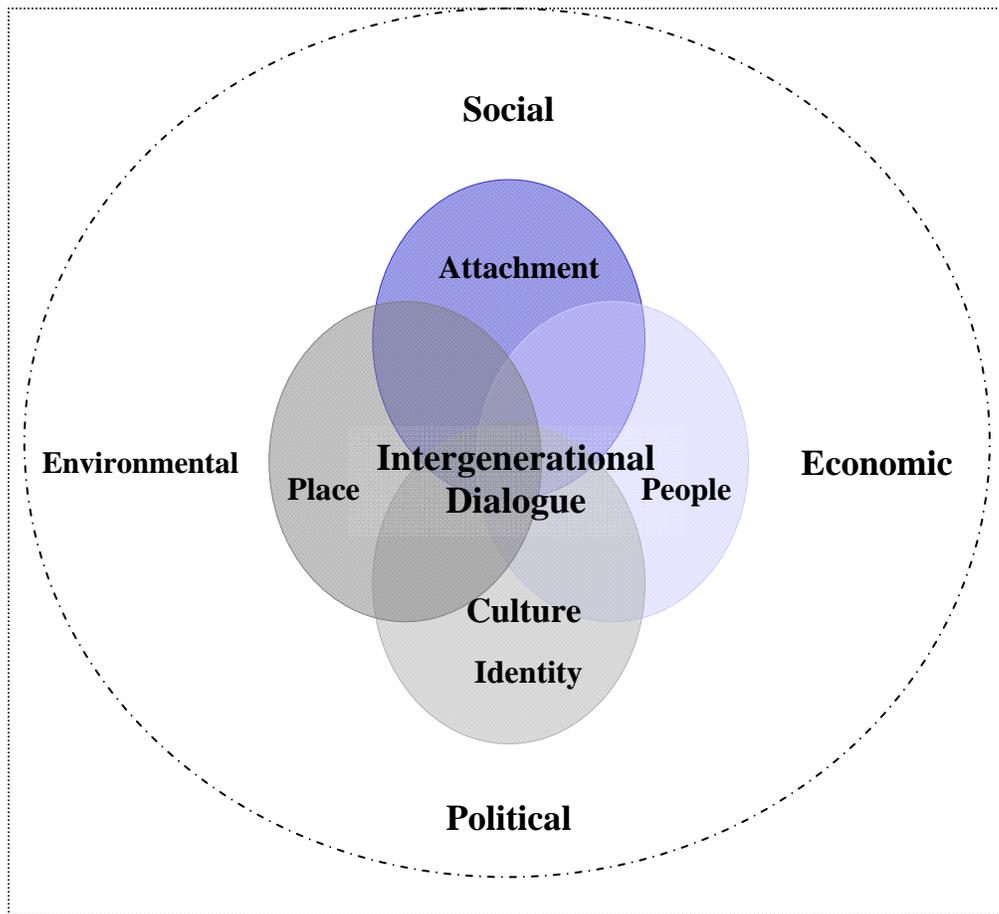
Significance of an Intergenerational Dialogue Framework

An intergenerational dialogue framework is particularly relevant to research that aims to enhance rural community education and social policy development. Dialogue that connects the concepts of conscientization, dialogue, and liberation (Freire, 1970; 1993) engages participants in a community-centered reciprocal dialogue, with participation linking learners and educators with an active consciousness. Learners are active participants in their own learning process, with important experiences and insights to share. They may also choose to apply this knowledge to take critical action. The dialogue process deepens our understanding of discourse and relationships of power that exist as well as our roles as agents for change in rural areas. The *intergenerational dialogue*, in the form of guided community dialogues involves both youth and adults. Adult and youth participants interviewed each other

and had opportunities to tell their stories and share their community experiences in a reciprocal mentorship process and exchange of ideas. Mentorship and engagement contribute to learning from shared experiences, connecting with allies, identifying assets, and "bridging the gap" to understand the challenges or concerns of youth and adults in rural communities (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2004; The Ontario Rural Council - TORC, 2007; Freechild, 2009). This framework is generalizable to other rural communities facing similar challenges.

Through learning and engagement between generations, dialogue is uniquely positioned to offer a new way of understanding communities and ways of acting in the world through the process of conscientization. It creates spaces for mentorship and exploration of participants' ways of expressing their learning and commitment to sustainable rural communities. It opens spaces to participate in and analyze civic engagement within a rural community context. In addition, it builds on theory, including social capital theory, sense of community, dialogic learning and conscientization to examine a broader social context and create a foundation from which to evaluate the strengths and shortcomings of other theories and practical applications. As was highlighted in the previous chapter, a dialogue process encourages community members' roles as informal mentors and educators as a way of strengthening community engagement.

In this study I conducted an intergenerational dialogue in a rural community to explore this process with rural community members. In the dialogue process I included guiding questions that were informed by the responses to my survey and interview questions, and explored my central research question about how an intergenerational dialogue framework can enhance our understanding of the factors that influence rural youth migration. By examining factors that impact youth engagement and participation, research participants contributed insight into the many dimensions of rural community life, and demonstrated that a process that engages youth and adults can lead to decision-making and creating knowledge together.

I developed an intergenerational framework based on my theoretical understanding of the literature, personal experiences living and working in rural

communities, and through semi-structured interviews with rural youth and adults. This framework was then applied and tested as a conceptual tool and a starting point to understand and analyze the relationships between my research and rural community development. The framework offers an intergenerational approach to examine and understand factors that influence youth engagement in rural communities and youth migration. Social factors such as a sense of community, and the importance of belonging and participating were most frequently reflected in the dialogue findings, but these factors intersected social, economic, educational, cultural and environmental aspects of rural community life. Ultimately my thesis is based on working with rural community members to share their own perceptions, theories, and community knowledge, and to co-construct a range of possible approaches to analyzing community issues and community-based solutions. It honours rural community knowledge with a focus on youth and adults from various sectors.

In sum, my research explored the connections between rural youth identity, social networks, sense of place, mobility, and the implications for educational policy. What Corbett (2007) describes as "multiple discourses of strategic decision-making" and "mobility capital" were crucial foundations from which to view research or rural communities and rural youth mobility (p. 246-252). Corbett (2007) contends that "in the context of rural economies, capital must be transformed from fixed, locally negotiable capital…into mobile capital represented by formal educational credentials" but begins to illuminate the inherent tensions between staying and leaving for youth, communities, educators and policy-makers (p. 251). Corbett's (2007) theoretical foundations offer a starting point and a lens through which to examine Bourdieu's theories (Logic of Practice and cultural capital), Foucault's theories of agency, and the work of contemporary scholars such as Theobald (1997), to examine rural youth migration and mobility. My interest in bridging this theory with practice, and building new theory, responds to the diversity and context of rural communities.

In this study, I combined the data collection methods of survey, semi-structured interviews and intergenerational dialogue in a rural community to understand the patterns of mobility, these tensions, and the stories that are often untold in rural areas.

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Researchers and policy-makers emphasize the need for additional research that examines cultural continuity, family relations and support or lack of support, and more focused research with sub-groups of rural youth (for example, Mennonite youth or marginalized youth in rural Alberta) to better identify resilience and risk factors (Looker, 2001).

Moving an Intergenerational Framework and Dialogue into Action

In my theoretical foundations and review of the literature I identified that seniors and youth are named as critical links in Alberta rural development policy (Alberta Government, 2005). My proposed intergenerational dialogue framework adds substance and new knowledge to the field by researching the possibilities for mentorship and intergenerational dialogue between youth and adults or seniors that extends well beyond the economic benefits. Provincial policy documents also name a commitment to support innovative approaches to community development and co-operatives. This provides a platform for my research - demonstrating the importance of engaging local community members in dialogue, and initiatives such as inter-generational co-operatives that reflect an interconnected response beyond economic needs in rural communities.

A long-term objective and future direction is to develop resources for youth and adults to explore challenges, to learn how to build solutions together, to strengthen social economy in rural areas, and to constructively impact the health of their communities. Current examples of youth-adult partnerships and training curricula (The Ontario Rural Council - TORC, 2007; Freechild, 2009), do not address the unique realities of rural community organizing, or the barriers to change. The balance of power and privilege in rural communities is complex and dynamic. An intergenerational dialogue framework contributes new, highly relevant knowledge to connect and communicate with youth and adults in diverse rural contexts. Intergenerational learning builds on underpinnings of adult education; it creates opportunities for critical, democratic, and participatory praxis, and exemplifies the core adult education principle of constructing foundational theories and learning through critical reflection, action, and agency required for change.

An intergenerational dialogue, at the heart of my research methodology, puts this commitment into action. As results indicated, this process and the resulting framework have the potential to strengthen participation. It sets the foundation for a democratic process focused on inclusion and civic engagement. It can build social cohesion and deepen understanding of the factors that contribute to the well-being of the rural community. An intergenerational dialogue combines theory and practice to enhance the connection between youth and adults. This dialogue is relevant to policy discussion, analysis, implementation, and accountability.

One real life example of how the components of the Intergenerational Dialogue Framework may be applied is a potential conflict over space for youth in the rural community. This idea came up as an example in the dialogues, but it may also have deep historical and cultural roots within the community. Ultimately, if youth do not feel they are welcomed and have a place within the community, they may not feel it is a place in which they belong. For example, youth may want to use a public space such as a gymnasium, church, or Senior's Centre for youth events. In this section, I will go through the Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue step by step to demonstrate how it works in practice. The first step, **engagement,** involves **participation** and **partnership,** in which community members faced with this issue and organize youth and adults together to address it. As dialogue participants in this study demonstrated, community members can meet together in any available shared space to begin the process. The important piece is inclusion and ensuring broad participation to the extent that it is possible within the rural community. In this way, intergenerational dialogue can contribute to discussion about issues and emphasizes reciprocal communication.

In order for the process to be effective, participation from both youth and adults is essential. In the second step, sharing **local knowledge,** community members share their knowledge and the history of the community through their stories and experiences. For example, youth and adults might have stories about what has worked or not worked in the past. In the case where the local church has been reserved for "church youth group only" events, there may be discussion about broader outreach within the community that is not faith-based in order to engage a

more diverse group of youth and ensure youth know that they have a place, that they belong in the community. On the other hand, the community members may discuss a space in the community where the youth would feel most welcome, and potential town events and how they might wish to participate. A sense of history may help to shape a younger generation's understanding of how some decisions have been made in the past, and a new youth perspective may help shape a new policy that fits the current rural context. The vital part of this step is building trust and rapport between the generations.

These first two steps demonstrate the first 4 elements of social capital, sense of community, engagement, and dialogue. Through the dialogue process, bonds and reciprocity are strengthened between generations, fostering a sense of membership and belonging. Youth and adults are actively engaged and participate as full members in the dialogue. The stage is set for conscientization to occur. The process is responsive to the elements of power and privilege, and attentive to the local context. **Decision-making,** the third step, involves a process of learning from these shared experiences, within the local community context. With increased understanding of the problem, and a forum in which to discuss a range of possible responses, youth and adults can consider the options and weigh the best response for the rural community. In this way the solution is community-based, and responsive to the specific factors that impact that community, rather than a reaction to a decision that is made outside the community or a decision made by just youth or adults.

Co-constructing theory, the fourth element of the Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue extends this process beyond the specific details of a meeting space for youth, and begins to build theory that is grounded in lived experiences of both youth and adults. Youth and adults may then discuss how mentorship and next steps could occur between the generations, such as preparing a plan to submit to town council, or a local school or church. At this stage the process is strengthened by brainstorming ideas for overcoming potential barriers, construct a "Plan B" together, or discuss alternatives if similar issues arise in the future. While youth may have an idea of the messiness of the issues, they may have a limited understanding of the broader playing field and implications of various approaches.

As demonstrated in the dialogues in Kitscoty, adults can situate the issues in the local environment and understand the various social, economic and environmental factors that impact the potential outcomes. Together youth and adults can enrich their knowledge by sharing their breadth of experience to unpack the issues from various points of view, tease out some of the issues and frame them in the local context. The broader significance of an intergenerational dialogue process is that it adds to, rather than replicates, a way of understanding rural outmigration by listening to community members and representing local interests.

Summary

In this chapter I developed a Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue drawing from the seven elements of my conceptual framework. I discussed the components of this framework and presented a Rural Community Development Model in which to situate dialogue between generations. These dialogues are the roots of enhancing rural education and community development policy. They engage rural community members in the process. Ultimately, the Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue contributes to practice and policy in 2 key areas: 1) rural education, and 2) rural community development. The dialogue framework contributes to rural education and community development by beginning to tell a real story of rural Alberta. Young people and adults are communicating directly about how and why we might keep young people in the community. . In the following chapter I discuss implications for practice and policy, and future directions for my research. An intergenerational dialogue framework is a resource or process for direct engagement with community members, and can be used to hear a range of diverse perspectives, with potential to include more marginalized voices.

Chapter 8 – Implications for Future Policy and Practice

In the previous chapter I used the key elements from the data analysis, and new knowledge learned through the dialogue process to build a framework. The elements of this framework may be generalized to assist in developing a model that can be applied in other communities. The concepts may also be applied more generally to the fields of adult education or community development. The previous chapters identified and analyzed key elements related to intergenerational learning, dialogue, and enhancing education and rural communities. Now, I turn my attention to the implications for policy and practice. In this chapter I discuss the implications for adult education and community development practice, and acknowledge the strengths and limitations of the study. I provide real examples of how my framework maybe applied, and recognize the significance of a distinct rural identity. I discuss next steps, contributions to the literature, and directions for future research.

Implications for Adult Education and Community Development Practice

In this section I will respond to the question, "So what?" What are the practical implications of my research for rural education and community development? First, the findings indicate that a community dialogue process fosters analysis of lived experiences within community and respectful sharing of points of view. This method can be used in other communities and rural settings to examine the assets and challenges within a community context. The framework for intergenerational dialogue offers a way to set the stage for a new way of communicating across generations. These conversations may already be taking place less formally, but the framework emphasizes that the communication be reciprocal, with adults and youth learning together. It provides a way to organize and explain the process and enhance the levels of trust within the group. The focus on safety and trust is imperative.

Building Trust

Trust is a key element in the dialogue process. The emphasis on trust and importance of relationships is important to future practice. What is the role of the connection between generations? As respondents indicated, the messages that they received in the rural community were very important to them. For example, from the perspective

of the young people I interviewed, those who heard from parents, teachers, or other community members that they would like to see them stay or return did not forget those encounters. Youth named these connections as important to how they might imagine their future and their opportunities. There is immense potential for mentoring and networking to strengthen social, economic, and environmental aspects of community life, as the interviews revealed. For those young people who had an adult take interest in their lives and choices, these influences were not forgotten, and as many indicated, they paid that mentorship back into the community by in turn mentoring young people in library programs, sports or music.

As the dialogue and interview findings indicate, it is important to critique who is included and who is left out of the conversation and more broadly, in rural community organizing. Educators are challenged to push back against assumptions about who will stay and who will leave, for example, and to teach critical reflection. This may include challenging the current structure of rural-urban divide in Alberta and in broader contexts. How do we build a just and sustainable community? How do we participate and engage? As the findings indicated, respondents felt that when the community invested in them through time, resources, and taking an interest in their lives, they were inclined to invest their time and energy back into the rural community. This participation and engagement has positive short and long-term implications. I highlight some of the potential outcomes of positive participation and mentorship below.

Volunteerism and Opportunities for Civic Engagement

Rural study participants often mentioned engagement through volunteerism. The interest and willingness to volunteer either when asked, or when their contributions were recognized and valued, points back to a sense of belonging, shared values, membership, and a sense of being part of the community. An interest in contributing to the rural community has implications for civic engagement. An intergenerational framework offers a way to understand and challenge power within the community structure, and an entry point to discuss formal and informal leadership. A dialogue framework presents an opportunity to act, which extends the discussion beyond communication and further toward agency. There is opportunity to talk about a range

of possible approaches or solutions. This opportunity was named in the community dialogue findings as important to encourage participation and an inclusive approach to problem-solving.

Connected to volunteerism and civic participation is the importance of having community members who really "see you" as an individual, and "have your best interests and community interests at heart" as was emphasized in the research findings. The social fabric of the rural community is vital, according to the respondents, but economic factors are part of the equation when they consider their future. Cooperatives and social economy initiatives may provide a way of linking the social and economic needs within a rural community. They are more than a job. They offer opportunities for civic engagement, leadership and skill-building, and focus on membership and participation. They have the potential to enhance and respect local culture and environment, two equally important aspects reflected in the literature and in the findings.

Recognizing Diversity, Environment, and Connection to Place

Throughout the interviews there are examples of diversity in rural communities, and similarities and differences in community 'discourse'. Some examples of this discourse are reflected in the way that rural community members speak about elements of the rural community, such as faith/church, hockey, family ties, and land. An intergenerational dialogue framework provides a way to engage community members as individuals, as well as part of a collective community. Further, concrete community development approaches like cooperatives and social economy initiatives offer a means for working together towards collective goals.

As I described in the previous chapters, the research findings point to the importance of landscape, a sense of place, and rural identity. The views of the participants are especially valuable in understanding the role of environmental stewardship, and the potential for rural education that is attentive to place. Rural educators have a shared responsibility, with the students and community members, to engage in education that is relevant and meaningful. The intergenerational dialogue

framework offers a method to understand local needs and construct this knowledge together between generations.

Discourse of Resistance and Possibility

Most memorable in the research findings are those stories that demonstrate some of the reasons for despair, but also offer a new discourse of resistance. A combination of hope and possibility is the key. There is evidence of action and hope throughout the interviews and dialogue. The important work in rural schools, as mentioned with pride in the dialogues, planting flowers as an alternative to vandalism suggested in another community, designing and implementing an international film festival in a small rural community, the outstanding work of the Safe and Caring community initiatives in rural areas - these examples show an alternative and demonstrate solidarity and agency. There is an interest and curiosity to be personally involved, courage to attack daunting challenges, and an emboldened desire to try. History of rural communities in Canada is rich with examples of creating, organizing, and resisting. Does the next generation possess this same feisty rural character and resilience? The dialogues gave me hope that these roots are solid. What emerges is a discourse of loss and risk on one hand, but also of resilience and possibility.

Implications for Rural Education

Rural schools, educators and parents are imperative to the support and structure of vibrant rural communities. As the interview findings indicate, and the intergenerational dialogue confirms, family and a sense of belonging impact the decisions that young people make about whether to stay, leave or return to rural communities. As the participants in the interviews acknowledged, open communication between generations is very important, and knowing that one can come home or a sense that the rural community "is where your home is" remains profound. Communication that involves local members can influence how future educators who plan to teach in a rural community can get to know these settings and dispel myths of what it is like to live and work in a rural setting. Several strategies were mentioned specifically as ways of enhancing local opportunities and sense of belonging.

1. Rural or regional educational institutions encourage rural youth to pursue post-secondary education, but continue a connection to the rural area: These institutions, such as Lakeland College, the Augustana Faculty of the University of Alberta, or Olds College, offer relevant curriculum and were mentioned by research participants as supportive to their education and personal development. These institutions also were mentioned as integral to the economy of rural communities through local employment opportunities and a link to the rural community by fostering an understanding of what it means to live and work in a rural area. This finding is interesting in light of current research by Sherman and Sage (2011). They recognize that social and economic forces contribute to rural youth out-migration, and that education and local schools can help determine the fate of a rural community, playing crucial roles educational opportunities for local youth, as well as contributing to the local economy.

2. Collaborating with Youth and Adults to Consider Alternatives in the Rural Community: Cooperatives and the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) to support youth in high school entering the trades were mentioned as primary options for rural youth. These programs connect youth with relevant post-secondary education and rural work opportunities. Some practical ways that rural teachers might engage students in relevant learning and encourage them to consider their future in a rural area is to explore rural history, economy, and labour market trends as part of the Social Studies curriculum. In conversations with rural students it was notable that many mentioned Social Studies as their favourite subject in school.

3. Sharing a Discourse of Possibility: Another practical research application is to organize a panel discussion for senior high school students and their parents. This could include local farmers, trades people, teachers, health workers, stay-at-home parents, cooperatives, local governance, and other professionals of all sectors to talk about their path from high school into career, and their choice to live in a rural community. By approaching this discussion from the vantage point of what is possible, the discourse of possibility is reinforced and modeled. The intergenerational dialogue framework could be applied to this conversation through

youth and adults interviewing each other about their interests and ways that their skills and interests might be applied within a rural community.

4. Sharing Local Knowledge: The province of Alberta is interested in strengthening local opportunities such as regional colleges. As Alberta Advanced Education (2005) policy discussions reveal, rural colleges are a fundamental component of rural community infrastructure and play important roles as catalysts for community renewal. They provide a place for knowledge and expertise to be shared and made available to community leaders, organizations, and the private sector; in other words, they are part of important knowledge networks (Alberta Advanced Education, A Learning Alberta, 2005). There is a call for innovative strategies and increased participation or "engagement" of rural Albertans. The Framework for Intergenerational Dialogue provides a means for collaborative participation that responds to this call for strategies that "emerge from community level planning" and are "multifaceted and multi-sectoral" (p.17). This work contributes a richer understanding of the issue of outmigration, and how to limit this trend by including people in the process of addressing issues and strengthening community. The results of this study indicate that this trend is not inevitable. The survey suggested a course of action such as town hall meetings or dialogue between youth and adults, while the interview participants spoke of the importance of social and environmental factors such as family connections, and history of a place and people. My contribution was to work with these findings to construct and test the process of intergenerational dialogue. The significant contribution of this study is a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the importance of social connections and demonstrating a way to engage with youth and adults through intergenerational dialogue to learn from their lived experiences that are rooted in these rural communities.

The implication of the study is that participation from local community members is vital for a deeper, more authentic understanding of the issue and potential responses. Although participants indicated that these exchanges may happen in the community, there is often a gap in how these issues might be examined. Dialogue is a community-based process that addresses this gap by providing a means to explore

the rural context with rural community members, and communicate these ideas by design, rather than by default.

Implications for Rural Community Development

In my introductory chapter I connected the local issue of rural out-migration to the global concerns of declining rural populations. In this section I return again to this link. Civic engagement and agency strengthen rural communities, and the local context provides a context for the research questions and definitions of my research study. International scholars' (Shiva, 2005; Herbert-Cheshire, 2000) examination of forms of governance that support local power and control over land, political process, and food production provide background context of the global rural realities that help to frame my thesis. My work with youth and adults in a process of mentorship may address a gap in the literature that does not identify youth as part of the solution to the political process and a range of rural issues. Herbert-Cheshire's (2000) work emphasizes the importance of this research. His questions about responsibility emphasize the need to advocate for local control in decision-making combined with continued support for rural community development through government resources. Some examples of rural intergenerational networks that are building skills are cooperatives like GENassist in Saskatchewan (2008), and internships with Alberta Community Cooperative Association (ACCA). As I outlined in my introductory chapter, rural communities have a vibrant history of farm community members organizing in Canada. Drawing on history and theories of adult education can offer evidence of the transformative process and the outcomes of community organizing across generations. These are valuable contributions to the fields of education and community development.

Findings from the dialogues provide evidence that public engagement with rural communities can generate ideas and alternatives to rural challenges. The example of a multi-generation farm cheese store in my study was one example of efforts to include the next generation in farms. Cooperatives or youth leadership training through 4-H may offer other methods to engage across generations and engage youth with the possibility to stay or return. This theory is consistent with the

literature that emphasizes a sense of place and connection (Orr, 2004; Wotherspoon, 1998; Gruenewald and Smith, 2008) and the possibilities of a new form of regional civic agriculture with community planning and participation at the core (Lyson, 2004). Intergenerational dialogue is a unique way to engage youth and adults to facilitate a mentorship approach, and engage in decision-making about land and resources that impacts social, economic, and environmental assets. Dialogue between generations can be applied to understand and advance rural community economic and social development.

My research extends the idea of local control of decision-making and resources and includes the next generation in discussion and succession planning. Further, it adds original research and praxis to existing theories that it is possible to create real spaces for restoration of sustainable agricultural systems as a "process of learning" wherein the interconnectivity of rural landscapes is respected and there is strong democratic social commitment to democratic knowledge exchange for the public good (see Weis, 2007, p. 170). This body of literature is vital to understand the future possibilities of rural communities, including farming and new models of food production such as community supported agriculture and cooperatives (Henderson and Van En, 1999; OECD, 1998). Mündel's (2008) research examined farmers' transition from high intensity farming to more sustainable practices. It highlighted the importance of future research that explores the ways in which community members express their learning and commitment to sustainable rural communities.

I recognize community members' roles as informal mentors and educators and create a forum to share points of view and lived experiences with potential for mentoring, networking, and understanding our communities and how we act in the world. The process of intergenerational dialogue adds new knowledge to the field of rural community social and economic development. It develops a basis to discuss issues such as the profound implications that fewer family farms represent to our rural history and ecology. Ultimately, it provides the theoretical and practical background to explain the need for an inter-sectoral approach to research, education, and community development.

My research builds on the body of literature by theorists with a particular focus on gender, education, and relations, including Easthope and McGowan's compilation (1992), and feminist perspectives of Lather (1992, 1991), and Luke (1996, 1992). Bourdieu's (1997) foundational work on the concepts of *social capital* and *cultural capital* are especially vital to explain the roles of family, gender, and networks in rural communities. These concepts are highly relevant to my research as I intend to understand and explain the issue of rural out migration. They have the capacity to move beyond theorizing to application of analysis and policy implementation with profound potential for social transformation.

Open communication was often highlighted by study respondents as central to their sense of belonging and sense of community. They emphasized the importance of really being "seen" and heard in the rural community. There are practical ways that community members might engage with rural youth who have left:

1. Invitations to Annual Events and Communication through Newsletter, Word of Mouth or Social Networking:

Several participants mentioned that there is an annual event in their rural community. This might be a rodeo or stampede, a seasonal festival or ball tournament. Other events such as family or school reunions may be strategically planned on these weekends. Community members could specifically invite rural youth who have left to return for these events, and engage them in conversation about local social and economic opportunities.

Communication may be word of mouth, or it could involve a newsletter, or connection through social networking. At least one participant mentioned that if the rural community had a Facebook page, they would use it to stay connected. By keeping lines of communication open, there are opportunities for getting to know who the young people are as individuals, and who they are becoming. There is also potential to consider links or a sense of purpose and membership that may draw them back to the rural community. The important factor is that the rural community is considered a welcoming place, and that it is seen as "home". A sense of belonging to this place, and a feeling that these people really know you and care about you were

themes mentioned in the research findings that may influence rural youth in their choice to stay or return.

2. Exploring Local Opportunities for Education and Employment:

In the rural community where I conducted my dialogue, younger dialogue participants were exploring options for careers based in or near the rural community. While several participants were involved in farming or where considering opportunities to contribute to the family farm, others were employed locally or at a nearby college, raising children or starting their own business. Other rural communities face more pronounced economic hardships, as represented in the survey and interview findings. With this in mind, future intergenerational dialogues could explore training for youth employment, and the structures and conditions that exist in rural communities where chronic youth unemployment is a barrier to youth participation. As Rubenson and Walker (2006) maintain, adult learning contributes to an understanding of the political and economic factors that impact communities. While the market plays a central role, there is a "shared responsibility between individual and [government], with recognition that unemployment is a structural and community concern, not simply individual" (Rubenson and Walker, 2006, p. 173-75). This collective approach moves beyond blaming individuals for issues that may lead to rural youth out-migration and increased mobility. It reflects work by scholars such as Fenwick (2006) who argue that learning and training processes (transferable in this context to rural communities) must question the balance of power, and the literature emphasizes a reflective practice to balance skills, knowledge, and values (Fenwick, 2006). Thus, future research could expand this theory, creating spaces for participation to discuss and debate how health, economy, and education are interconnected and affected by the structures that exist. However, I also emphasize the balance of skills, knowledge and values that shift the focus to the hope and power that comes from community organizing. Further, it is essential to promote action by generating creative solutions for leadership and education, and innovative opportunities for building intergenerational networks and collective, democratic participation.

3. Enhancing Rural Community Development and Civic Engagement:

The intergenerational dialogues in this study support education and rural community processes that engage youth and adults build social networks and work toward a more equal distribution of power and privilege within a community. The findings from the dialogues in this study highlight the importance of a sense of belonging to a community, and the social fabric of rural community life. These findings broaden the understanding of rural youth migration to ask more questions about factors that enhance or inhibit youth engagement, which extends far beyond economics factors that impact rural community populations. In this section, I draw connections between social economy and rural community sustainability. I point out ways that an understanding of intermediary organizations may have an impact on building resiliency and social capital in a community, and provide options for a younger generation to make a contribution to the community, living and working locally. While community economic development remains a high priority for rural communities concerned with local control over resources and long-term financial viability, economic concerns are just one critical dimension of local community development. Organizations such as Canadian Community Economic Development network(CCEDnet, 2009), Canadian Centre for Community Renewal (CCCR, 2009,) and Alberta Community Cooperative Association (ACCA, 2009) support a holistic vision of community development that is attentive to the social, economic, environmental and cultural elements of a community.

These contemporary organizations and their practical application of terms and tools serve as background for rural community development that aims to be attentive to practitioners and educators in the field while it contributes to policy and practice. The focus on participation and building social and economic networks, capacity for leadership and rural economies committed to social goals and environmental care is crucial. My research builds on this holistic view of community development and adds new knowledge to examine, explain, and respond to these interconnected aspects of rural community, by learning from the lived experiences of rural community members as they understand their own community's assets and challenges. Throughout this study, I grappled with questions about mobilities of rural

youth, and how to enhance the local opportunities for rural youth without limiting their potential. To this end, the intergenerational dialogue serves to understand local issues and assets from various perspectives, to explore the playing field and specific context, and build a sense of community. While individual choice may not often be challenged in contemporary educational discourse, my study opens a space to explore the benefits of a collective understanding of a sense of responsibility and belonging to a place, and communitarian values shared with people who live and work in that place. The emphasis on learning from and with community members is underscored by my choice to include theory on dialogue and engagement at the core of this research.

Implications for Rural Development Policy

In response to the findings from this research, I am left with questions of how best to address the need for broader educational supports that are attentive to place, and community development initiatives that respond to social, economic and environmental factors and provide a link across generations. It is evident from the findings that context is important. Rural decline is not inevitable. The story of rural communities is not over. Currently Alberta is rich is natural resources, namely oil and gas. How then do we create rural communities that are resilient, committed to social and economic equity, and not dependent on depleting resources? In the previous sections I stressed local community development and alternative ways to view education and employment. Intergenerational dialogue is one strategy to explore these dimensions and enhance the social fabric, so frequently mentioned in the data, and critical to strengthen rural communities.

The purpose of intergenerational dialogue is for youth and adults to be directly involved and influence the thinking about rural settings. The potential for dialogue lies in the dismantling of power and recognition and legitimization of voice, a deconstruction that cuts across generations. In this way, dialogue enhances our understanding of and issue and potential solutions. A public process adds validity for youth to question the breadth of knowledge that passes for rural policy. This input from youth and adults strengthens local capacity for leadership

from within the community, and increases the potential of local members to educate and train. The next steps are to put this dialogue work to the test. Next, I propose practical application of the dialogue process.

The intention of this research was to listen and represent rural community members' interests. In the future, I intend to add to a critique of the issues and situate the work in other rural community contexts, not replicating the study, but applying and testing the intergenerational dialogue framework. A long-term objective and future direction of proposing intergenerational dialogue as a learning resource in rural communities is to develop education theory and practice for youth and adults to explore challenges. They can learn to build solutions together, to strengthen social economy in rural areas, and to constructively impact the health of their communities. The dialogue framework and outcomes have implications for policy development. Specifically, they offer a guide to communicate about key questions as part of the policy process. For example, what are the objectives and primary goal of the policy? What are the actions that will lead to that goal? What are some of the opportunities and some of the threats that may impact the progress to the goal(s)? For example, in my theoretical section and literature review I identified that seniors and youth are named as critical links in the provincial Alberta rural development policy - *Alberta, a Place to Grow* (Alberta Government, 2005). The intergenerational dialogue framework explores the possibilities for mentorship and learning between youth and adults or seniors that extend well beyond the economic benefits. The provincial policy commits to supporting innovative approaches to community development and co-operatives. This provides a platform for my research that engages local community members in dialogue, and suggests increased focus on initiatives such as inter-generational co-operatives - responding to more than an economic need in rural communities.

My research explores the connections between rural youth identity, social networks, sense of place, mobility, and the implications for educational policy. For example, provincial governments call for methods of engaging rural community members to find out what makes Alberta communities successful in attracting, retaining, or re-attracting youth and professionals to the community (Rural Alberta

Development Network, 2011). What Corbett (2007) describes as "multiple discourses of strategic decision-making" and "mobility capital" are crucial foundations from which to view research with rural communities and rural youth mobility (p. 246-252). Corbett (2007) contends that "in the context of rural economies, capital must be transformed from fixed, locally negotiable capital…into mobile capital represented by formal educational credentials" but begins to illuminate the inherent tensions between staying and leaving for youth, communities, educators and policy-makers (p. 251).

By learning from the survey, semi-structured interviews, and community dialogue I was able to better understand the patterns of mobility, their inherent tensions, and the stories that are often untold in rural areas. Researchers and policy-makers emphasize the need for additional research that examines cultural continuity, family relations and support or lack of support, and more focused research with sub-groups of rural youth (for example, Mennonite youth or marginalized youth in rural Alberta) to better identify resilience and risk factors (Looker, 2001).   My research thesis addresses the gap of understanding the complex factors influencing youth mobility and how it is expressed and understood by youth and adults in rural communities by working with community members in a new form of community dialogue and reciprocal mentorship between these youth and adults.

There are current examples of youth-adult partnerships and training curricula (The Ontario Rural Council - TORC, 2007; Freechild, 2009), but these do not currently address the unique realities of rural community organizing, or address the current barriers to change. The balance of power and privilege in rural communities is complex and dynamic. This research emphasizes the need to engage youth and adults together in dialogue to understand the assets and challenges in rural communities, and to respond to these complex questions as individuals and with a collective voice. It provides evidence that rural communities are seeking programs and policy with their interests and needs at the core of future planning. It points to the need for policy co-developed with and for rural community members. The findings in this study support a community development model with intergenerational dialogue as a means to involve rural youth and adults together as

accountable members in the full cycle of policy research, design, implementation and evaluation.

Limitations of the Study and Possibilities of Dialogue

This study leaves me hopeful, but with a recognition that this research and issues facing rural communities are complex. There are limitations to the study and to the process of dialogue that I want to acknowledge here. This research included rural community members selected for unique reasons considered significant in the literature on rural youth migration, and based on my experience. Rural community members emphasize that there is a need to include young people who are involved in leadership roles in their communities, as well as newcomers to the community, with an emphasis on diversity and inclusiveness (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2004). There was a chance of only including participants from prominent families, or certain socio-economic status. As I explained in my methods section, I used a number of methods and ways of advertising the study to address this limitation, and my participants were selected before I had this detailed information. This mitigates some of the risk of choosing only the youth or adults who are of a certain social or economic background, or only those who have the benefit of strong networks and influence, or social capital.

I chose to interview youth aged 18-30 because this range includes key ages reflected in the literature as critical periods of transition. In these periods, rural community members make choices about staying, leaving, or returning to rural communities (Dupuy, et al., 2000). Although I include current and former rural community members who have stayed, left, and may return to rural communities in the future, it is primarily their perspectives on their rural identity and the factors that promote or inhibit rural youth migration and engagement in rural communities that were the focus of this thesis.

I also recognize that there are limitations inherent in research methods aimed at learning from lived experiences (Wellington, 2000). Interviews require time, trust and rapport building with participants. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to investigate and prompt the interviewees' stories and lived experiences, while

observation provided an opportunity to learn from participants' behavior. Because the interviews were "designed to elicit views and perspectives (the unobservable)," however, their purpose was not to establish an inherent "truth" (Wellington, 2000, p. 71). The interviews rely on interpretation and an understanding that they represent multiple truths and experiences that contribute to developing theory to address the question "why"? The data and the results may be influenced by the researcher's own perceptions and interpretations, (Wellington, 2000) but member checks and dialogue with other academic colleagues in the field during the data analysis stage addressed this limitation.

Although surveys may be limited in the scope of information that they provide for developing a hypothesis or theory, when used to deepen the understanding of data from the interviews and other methods they provide insight into the research questions. They contribute to representativeness through a broader range of respondents not "typical" of rural community members who are studied in depth in the semi-structured interviews and through observation (Bell, 1993; Wellington, 2000). To address the potential limitations of who was represented in the sampling and response in the survey, I constructed criteria and definitions based on the literature to address this issue (Wellington, 2000). Surveys were distributed through University of Alberta and college department listservs and I maximized the use of electronic networks (Wellington, 2000).

The final step of my methodology was to facilitate two intergenerational dialogues. These dialogues were intended to provide insight and depth to compliment the survey research and semi-structured interviews. The sampling strategy for the intergenerational dialogue was purposeful and relied on posters, outreach at community events, and snowballing to find participants. As I mentioned previously, the age range for youth and adults was also impacted by the numbers of young people I was able to reach, and the youth participants for the dialogues are somewhat older than I anticipated, with only 1 male. In part, this reflects the population of the rural community and youth migration, because some youth in their early 20s have left the community, and the median age is 30. Despite the challenges in recruiting, I had three generations participating in the dialogue, with the youngest

member in her early 20s, and the oldest in mid-60s. One older male farmer considered participating, but had to harvest the night of the dialogue. If I wanted to connect with a diverse group of younger community members in the future, long-term connections with local 4-H groups, youth groups, clubs, and sports teams would be essential. I would propose to work with these groups and their parents, leaders, or other adult community members. There are limitations to using dialogues as a method - they require time, resources, and planning. However, the strength of the dialogue lies in the interactive discussions to work through issues collectively, and to explore the reasons behind responses. In future work, it would be ideal to follow up to an even greater extent with dialogue participants and write about the dialogue experience together with them.

Finally, there are also limitations and possibilities to the process of dialogue. The organized rural community dialogues provided a contemporary, living example of communication between members of the community, including adult and youth participants. There are also examples throughout the interviews and survey responses from which to explore the importance of learning through dialogue and exchanging examples of lived experiences. Participants from the survey noted that possible supports might include more intergenerational activities, and those "supporting and enhancing better relationships between parents and youth and elder people" (Survey respondent). Strong bonds between generations were also noted as reasons to stay within a rural community, such as the son-mother-grandmother relationship (Adam) and family ties contributing to a creative initiative - a local film festival (Ben).

Based on adult education strategies, there is support for exploring ideas from the "lived experience" of community members to examine methods that counter the negative impact of out-migration on the health of rural communities. Concrete examples include youth unemployment, closures of schools and health centers, and loss of family farms, as well as lack of community-based leadership and control over local natural resources. Although the literature from the Rural Canadian Partnership (2004) and other youth studies (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000) speaks about education and employment, a research study has not brought generations together to examine factors promoting and limiting participation in rural communities. Such a

study could explore practical links between access to resources and training, social structures, economy, environment (natural and human) and rural-out migration. The concrete examples of education and employment could be explored through intergenerational dialogue. While training for youth employment, and youth unemployment are mentioned in the literature on youth migration and mobility (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000) chronic unemployment is not a direct issue at this time in Kitscoty. However, the structures and conditions that exist in rural communities and especially the role of educators, parents and key stakeholders in supporting young people to overcome education and employment barriers are critical to my study.

Dialogue shifts the balance of power that extends beyond the confines of the dialogue participants. Vella (2004) offers some insight into a shift in consciousness, and the rural community dialogue in this study demonstrated the seeds of these shifts in thinking. Through the sharing of knowledge, and voicing the issues, spaces are made for community members to tell their stories. For example, these stories might be about a specific incident where participants felt excluded, or a general state of inclusion and exclusion. With specific examples, as provided in this dialogue process, there is room for members to be attentive to power imbalances and help to shift these within the broader community. Dialogue members, for example, may return to their organizations and groups with ideas of how to engage and include a broader sector of the rural community, including ages, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and gender.

A caution here is to ensure attentiveness to the trust and safety required for dialogue. The risk of further exclusion or isolation in the community if specific dialogue members were "named" is an example of the need for a deep level of trust and respect. A safe place to pose questions and problems is critical. I emphasize here the importance of attentiveness to setting the tone and expectations for the dialogue process. In the next section, I examine how these findings might be explored further through the dialogue process, through adult education and mentoring, and ultimately how dialogue may contribute to change.

Finally, another limitation and strength was my own position as a researcher who has lived through some of the experiences that are reflected in the study. Thus, I do not claim to be independent or without bias. Through writing about the challenges conducting research in rural communities and considering my role as a researcher, I attempt to reflect critically on my own position and the perspectives that are impacted by my own background. I turn now to the implications for rural education and community development.

Future Directions for Research

My research provides a living example of how a community dialogue process can open spaces to talk about lived experiences within the community. I assert that the initial step where participants interview each other and share points of view sets a foundation for deeper conversations and potential for collective analysis of these experiences. Many of the dialogue participants had met each other in advance, and some worked together on other committees. I posit that this trust and sense of mutual respect was an important starting point for the dialogues to progress. If the participants had not known each other from the community, I suggest that additional activities to set the tone for sharing experiences may have been required. As I explored in my previous chapter, relationships take time and commitment. The role of the connections between generations is demonstrated from both the youth voices, and the adult and senior members. Further, it is important to critique who is included, and who is left out of conversations at a local level. It is evident from the interviews that mentoring and networking have potential. What then, is to be learned about the role of adult education within rural communities, both for education and community development? How might educators take up a call as Grace suggested in the dialogues, and teach critical reflection? How might we build a just and sustainable community in Alberta, or in a global context?

The dialogues and interviews demonstrate the diversity of rural communities and the similarities and differences in how they are discussed. For some the uniting factor is faith, or church, while others speak about family ties, land or even the quintessential rural image - hockey. While there are differences in communities, and

across generations, certain elements remain consistent. A focus on civic participation and environmental stewardship is at the core, with a call from the youth who have stayed and those who have left to consider the importance of landscape and place. Engagement and volunteerism are highly valued by participants. Through the dialogues I heard and observed more about community structure and support for youth engagement. In the following chapter I will delve into power within the community structure and leadership, both informal and formal. As I previously stressed, young people who have left spoke about the importance of community members valuing them as individuals, and to know that they "really see you" and have "your best interests and community interests at heart." These words say it best. What then might draw young people back to rural places? As the survey respondents suggested, and the dialogues and interviews confirmed, the choices are most often social, or related to a sense of community and a sense of place. In the final section I will explore the question, "then what?" So what then does this research tells us about the connections between generations, and our understanding of the factors that might contribute to rural communities? Are these the communities in which young people might stay or return?

Emerging Theory: Connecting Data, Theory and Research Questions

The theoretical foundations grounding my research included social and learning theories in four key strands: sense of community theory, social capital theory, and theories of dialogic learning and conscientization. A synthesis of social theory with an emphasis on community development provided a point of entry to identify essential elements in the findings and understand the responses to my research questions. More broadly, these theories provided a way to understand and discuss rural out-migration and youth engagement in communities. I expanded on these developments in my conceptual framework, methodology, my findings and analysis. Finally, a synthesis of my theory, data, and research questions formed the basis of a new framework for intergenerational dialogue.

This research connects the theory of sense of community and social capital. It builds on the theory of dialogic learning and demonstrates the importance of these theories to understand the connection between adults and youth in rural communities.

However, it is critical to go a step further. We can theorize how Freire's notion of conscientization might inform further research to develop new understandings of connections between community members and their own learning. With these four foundational theories in mind, application of these concepts to research involving multiple generations in a rural context must be tested. I drew on these theories to consider how (or if) rural youth perceive their sense of community, their agency, their "home," their networks, and their place in the community. Future studies might apply intergenerational dialogue in additional rural communities, and consider how a new form of dialogue based on the *Intergenerational Dialogue Framework* might contribute to understanding issues across generations and in other contexts. This next step extends the contribution of this study to explore factors influencing youth migration, support rural communities, and counter rural youth out-migration.

There is a clear need to build on existing theories and develop new and original research addressing not just why young people stay, leave, or return to rural communities, but the critical question of how we might best respond through supportive policy and practice. This thesis extends the existing theory to understand the root causes and connections of factors that enable or inhibit youth engagement in rural communities through dialogue between youth and adults in rural communities. I can now advance the theory to relate more directly to the rural context, continuing to question how gender is included or excluded from the conversation, and how knowledge and power is understood and perpetuated. The Intergenerational Dialogue Framework can now be replicated to explore the issues in other community contexts.

This research contributes new, highly relevant knowledge to connect and communicate with youth and adults in diverse rural contexts. As I have emphasized, intergenerational learning builds on underpinnings of adult education; it creates opportunities for critical, democratic, and participatory praxis, and exemplifies the core adult education principle of constructing foundational theories and learning through critical reflection, action, and agency required for change. My research method put this commitment into action - strengthening participation through a democratic process. The intergenerational framework can be applied to

conversations between youth and adults in a community process. This process is focused on equity, social cohesion, environmental care, and the well-being of the rural community. This study combines theory and practice, enhancing the connection between youth and adults that is relevant to policy discussion, analysis, implementation, and accountability.

This theoretical perspective offers insight into factors that serve to keep young people in a rural community, as well as factors that may draw them away, entice them back, or keep them from returning. Where Corbett (2007) and other scholars (Wotherspoon, 1998; Theobald, 1997), focus on formal education systems as part of the discussion of rural areas and mobility, I contribute unique knowledge to the field by exploring nonformal education and supports in rural communities. These include learning through social networks, intergenerational cooperatives, and mentorship as factors that build community cohesion and offer social and economic opportunities to rural youth.

An intergenerational dialogue framework informed and structured my thesis. I then explored existing and emerging theories to frame and explore rural youth migration and factors that enhance or inhibit engagement. Social capital and sense of community were key theoretical foundations for understanding the importance of connections, participation, and a sense of belonging. Together with rural community youth and adults I worked collaboratively to explore their experiences and ideas. In the future, I would like to strengthen existing theories or develop new theories, models, and practical strategies that transform this theory into action (Wellington, 2000, p. 37).

Rural Identity – Enhancing Engagement and Belonging

What started as a study on rural out-migration has led me to a deeper understanding that rural identify and a sense of belonging is a key factor in addressing this issue. For example, feeling included or excluded in a rural community may be as "simple" as being part of a sports team, or not. I knew in advance that rural community dynamics are complex, but this is an important insight that helps to explain the nuanced reasons that youth may choose to return, or may feel more "at home"

anywhere but the rural community. This is an important focus for my future research. In the following section I discuss rural identity and how strengthening positive intergenerational connections can enhance a sense of belonging to a rural community. I then suggest some relevant directions for both educators and community members who wish to support rural youth and to policy-makers who want to enhance rural community development and education policy. Although literature on youth transition refers to the importance of historical and contemporary context such as global trends, gender relations, labour, and family relations (Castells, 1997; McDowell, 2003; Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005), there are four essential areas for further research. These include: 1) Rural Identity Construction; 2) Exploring Power and Inclusion: Diversity and Youth Facing Barriers in Rural Communities; 3) Exploring a Sense of Place, Community and Belonging: Youth Migration and the Impacts on Rural Identity and Family; and 4) Exploring Creative Possibilities for Relevant Education in Rural Communities. First, understanding rural identity construction is crucial.

Social characteristics, structures, and dynamics that impact young peoples' identities and transitions are multifaceted. There is a need for more research to understand the sense of community and rural identity that strengthens rural community resiliency. A dynamic sense of rural identity and sense of place that was articulated in the interview data suggests an important interplay and interconnectedness between youth and their rural community. This sense of belonging, or in some cases, a sense of belonging between the spaces of a rural community and the community that youth have now chosen as home, was important because there are tensions in what is gained and what is given up through the course of making choices. While urban youth also face education and employment choices, rural youth often have to leave the community to pursue post-secondary education or work.

This research points to the importance of understanding the possibilities that exist within rural communities and reinforces the importance of rural educators and policy makers supporting a range of options for rural youth. Intergenerational connections, through the dialogue framework, informal connections, or other forms

of community participation, offer a method for rural youth to engage in rural community life and to hear the message that they are important as individuals as well as part of the collective fabric. Connections between the generations offer a way to engage in a discourse of opportunity and possibility.

To gain a deeper understanding of rural identity, engagement, and a sense of belonging, I am interested in exploring three key areas, including diversity and youth facing barriers in rural communities, how youth migration impacts rural identity and family, and creative possibilities for relevant education in rural communities. I now address each of these in turn.

1. Exploring Power and Inclusion: Diversity and Youth Facing Barriers in Rural Communities:

During my research I had an extended discussion with a young man from a small rural community. He told me that he felt more comfortable and understood coming "out" as homosexual in an urban setting than he did coming "out" as rural (conversation April, 2010). I have been thinking about this example and what it means to be included in a rural community, and how youth make the transition to an urban home. I was also trusted with some examples of rural young peoples' perceptions of limited diversity and insufficient acceptance in their rural hometown for them to feel as though they belonged. In future work, I want to explore some of these stories and barrier or supports to a sense of identity and belonging.

2. Exploring Sense of Place, Community and Belonging: Youth Migration and Impacts on Rural Identity and Family:

I am interested to continue exploring youth migration and its impacts on a sense of rural identity and family in Alberta, and the impacts of these transitions. Some of this migration is related to moving from the East Coast of Canada to Northern Alberta for work in the oil and gas industry, or the pursuit of education and employment. It is also evident that other provinces or more rural and remote communities do not all benefit from Alberta's economic prosperity. For example, young people from Newfoundland and Eastern Canada are re-locating to Alberta for work. With renewed resource-based initiatives in Eastern Canada, some youth are returning to

their home communities, or waiting for the day when they can secure a job there and go back "home." What is the impact of this interprovincial youth migration on a sense of rural identity and family? Holdsworth and Morgan's (2005) work on transitions and leaving home begins this exploration. They recognize that youth embody social characteristics far beyond age - including "gender, ethnicity, and social class that has an impact on their life transitions" (Holdsworth and Morgan, 2005, p. 27). These scholars call for additional research on the impact of globalization on these characteristics and youth transitions. Thus, it is important to recognize the limits of the theoretical concepts that ground my work, and to continue to situate my research in an historical and cultural context with attention to the broader scope.

3. Exploring Creative Possibilities: Relevant Education in Rural Communities:

During the course of my research I was privileged to view images and hear about the preliminary results of a Photo Voice project conducted between youth and adults in the rural community of Pipestone, Alberta. A local pastor is asking important questions about where meaningful exchanges occur within the rural community, what motivates people, and how community development occurs. His questions are meaningful to my work, such as how we keep young people in rural communities.

Using photography and storytelling as a tool to engage and include some marginalized members who might not participate, he is eliciting responses about why rural community matters, and what motivates participation. These images tell the story of rural Alberta and spark meaningful public discourse. I am interested in the type of work that, as he puts it, "gets at the core of identity" and "provides a meaningful place to come together and engage in meaningful discourse" (Alberta Rural Development Network presentation, September 19, 2011). Photography and narrative are key means to connect and tell the stories of our lives. In future research projects I would like to integrate these elements to engage with rural community members, local community leaders and educators.

Many adults who work with youth have offered to participate in future studies. For example, at an environmental educational conference in 2011, I met youth and

adults who work with youth in Hay River, North West Territories. They are interested in the results from this study and in telling me more about their experiences on and off the reserve. A town councilor from Peace River also invited me to conduct research in her community, acknowledging that community members are very interested in strengthening communication between generations. I have technical skills to share in photography, drama, and art education, and would like to work together with other educators in this process. Several Aboriginal youth and educators from a Northern community have expressed interest in participating and offered support for future research. As I learned through this experience, building trust and rapport with potential participants takes time. Initial contacts who are interested in engaging in this work together and broadening the impact are essential to the process. Connecting with those who are already keen to contribute their voices or collaborating on future studies speaks to the importance of continuing this work.

Summary and Concluding Perspective: Reflecting on My Rural Identity and Research

In this study I examined my research questions and analyzed and interpreted the data through an intergenerational dialogue approach. My introductory chapter provided evidence in the literature of a striking portrait of rural out-migration as an international issue with dramatic implications for the social and economic realities of rural communities, the theoretical foundation served as grounding from which to explain and explore the phenomena.

There are costs and benefits to rural community membership, and an insider status does not guarantee inclusion or 'success' for rural youth - or for me as a researcher. In fact, as the literature confirms, it could impede the process and bias findings. In this study I emphasized that the topic was important and personal for me in order to build trust about my capacity to listen and record participant experience. I did not elaborate with the participants about my own experiences. Insight into rural life may enhance the depth and range of understanding of an issue or population and make it more accessible, but the work of Dwyer and Buckle (2009) and Kanuha (2000) reminds us that there are important questions of objectivity, reflexivity, and

authenticity when a researcher has too much previous knowledge of the community or is too similar to the participants in the study.

There is a risk of role confusion or the potential for the researcher to be too familiar with the research setting or participants through a role other than that of researcher (Asselin, 2003). This may impact data analysis or cause confusion in the data analysis stage. It could impact the interpretation of the text and analysis. A benefit of the dual insider and outsider role in my case was acceptance, a level of trust and openness in my participation, and a starting point, a foundation from which to begin. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) address the costs and benefits of insider/outsider membership by emphasizing that "disciplined bracketing and detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with close awareness of one's own personal biases and perspectives" is necessary. They focus on the "ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience" relying not only on the researcher's relationships with individual participants, but identification with the broader participant population (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p.59-60).

Some researchers dig into the tension and ambiguity of this in-between space. They approach the relationship as insider-outsider with the hyphen acting as a bridge for this position between two communities (Aoki, 1996; Kanuha, 2000 as cited in Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). In my experience with this study, it is clear that I occupy this space between. My research is strengthened with a new awareness of my own bias and assumptions about rural community life, enhancing the depth and breadth of my analysis. It pulls me into the present with a deeper understanding of the research that is current and real. Researchers have called for an exploration of the richness of the space between insider and outsider, beyond the dichotomy of two opposing sides. I respond to the need for future research to explore this complexity and to develop new ways to work with these tensions.

My research offers a new perspective by addressing the intersections between education and community development policy with a commitment to place and rural identity. An intergenerational model of education, connecting youth and adults,

contributes new knowledge and a purposeful approach to rural community organizing. Through the process of analyzing the dialogue and interview data, I found rich examples of what scholars describe as the power of a critically conscious learning community that has the capacity to generate its own solutions (Freire, 1993; Spencer, 2006; Welton, 2006) Welton (2006) aptly refers to this capacity as, "imagination to master their life situations"(p.24). The goal of the participatory, reflexive learning community emphasized in the body of adult education literature was foundational to this research. From these new understandings I developed the intergeneration dialogue framework to engage in conscious learning and to communicate about local issues and solutions across generations. Although this study is not intended to be duplicated, intergenerational dialogue can be applied in other communities to develop a critique of the issues facing rural communities, bring out a deeper understanding of issues and potential solutions, and situate the issues in a local and broader context. The value of dialogue between generations is the direct influence that youth and adults can have on thinking about rural settings, the validity and authenticity of local community members to question how things are, to imagine the possibilities of how they might be, and shape rural policy.

Where my research builds on history and makes it most relevant to the present rural context is the emphasis on youth and adults communicating together about issues and a range of potential solutions to the negative impacts of rural out-migration. These crucial points of engagement may best be understood through a lens that reveals what Schugurensky (2006) describes as "critical understandings of unequal social structures and engagement in political struggles" (p.69). This connection between younger and older generations to be directly involved in decision-making signifies an opportunity for re-skilling and engaging in rural community life to contribute to broader social change.

Perspectives gained through the theory and current literature provide a foundation for my research questions, and enhanced my understanding of my unique position as a researcher, educator, and mentor who has lived and worked in rural communities. These theories then provide a foundation through which to explore and develop a model for working with rural community youth and adults. Ultimately, I

developed an intergenerational framework based on my theoretical understanding of the literature, personal experiences living and working in rural communities, and through semi-structured interviews with rural youth and adults. The framework was then applied and tested as a conceptual tool. It is a starting point to understand and analyze the relationships between this research and rural community development. This framework was relevant to my research question as it offers an intergenerational approach to examine and understand social, economic, educational, cultural and geographical (environmental) factors that influence youth engagement in rural communities and youth migration. My thesis was based on working with rural community members to share their own perceptions, theories, and community knowledge, and to co-construct a range of possible responses and ways of analyzing community issues and community-based solutions.

As I reflect on the process of the past years, it is clear that the issue of rural community decline has been one I have been thinking about since I left our farm in southern Saskatchewan twenty years ago. Youth migration and the potential for young people to return and find a place in the rural community was what initially sparked my interest in this work. What I have learned over the past four years is that the reflection about what makes a community a place where members feel welcomed and engaged is a critical part of understanding how rural communities might be sustained. It was a privilege to learn directly from rural community members how this happens, for whom, and how we might increase engagement and participation. The intergenerational dialogue process, though challenging and sometimes surprising, provided a strong example that the daily lives of rural community members are filled with countless kind and courageous acts.

Perhaps the most poignant finding in my study was a steady voice of resistance that boldly defies the despair I have witnessed in my own rural community and read about in the literature. This hope, which was demonstrated and grounded in action, provides an alternative way of viewing rural communities. It is a profound reminder that this is a discourse of both risk and loss, but more passionately, of resilience and possibility. That spark of hope does not to diminish the reality of the loss of family farms, or the statistics presented in my initial chapter as an illustration of this study's

relevance. However, promise is demonstrated in multiple generations who are willing to talk about local rural community assets and challenges with honesty and passion. Their willingness to contribute their voices and time confirms that these conversations matter. In future work I intend to delve deeper into where and how dialogues between generations occur. Ultimately these are important questions and insights into how we can and will build the types of communities in which we want to live.

Appendix A – Glossary of Terms Used in Thesis

Adult leaders – I define adult leaders or mentors as experienced community members who are nonformal or formal leaders or mentors who are recognized by the youth as such. My concept of leadership and mentorship draws from research conducted by the Rural Secretariat (2002).

Assets – Within the context of this thesis, I will draw on the definition of assets as skills, resources, and tangible items that we want to keep, build upon and sustain for future generations (Fuller, Guy & Pletsch, 2001). Scholars maintain that assets also serve as resources for proposing solutions to community-based problems (Fuller, et al., 2001). I build on this definition to include the collective events, histories and memories in rural communities.

Community and Community Development – In the theoretical chapter I define these terms drawing on Bhattachararyya's (2004) theory of community as solidarity and shared values, and community development that emphasizes solidarity and agency, two concepts that are central to this research. These guiding elements of solidarity and agency help to frame the purpose (collective vision), method (activities, practical and academic approaches), and techniques (resources, tools) for community development.

Community Dialogue - A community dialogue is described by the Canadian Rural Partnership (2011) as a forum that draws participants from as many parts of the community as possible to exchange information face-to-face, share personal stories and experiences, honestly express perspectives, clarify viewpoints, and develop solutions to community concerns and opportunities. Unlike debate, dialogue emphasizes listening to deepen understanding. It develops common perspectives and goals, and allows participants to express their own interests. A dialogue is a community conversation that can take many forms, from kitchen table meetings to a large community hall, or anything in between. This definition informs this study, but I build on this concept of dialogue to include youth and adults in **intergenerational dialogue** that I highlight as my final definition.

Community Health – For this thesis, I draw on Wendell Berry's vision (see for example, 2009, 2008, 1990) of land, food and community as intimately connected, with a focus on privileging local knowledge, local resource systems, and ecology. I build on Caton and Larsh's (2000) definition of community health based on the Ontario Healthy community model that includes active participation and problem-solving in all aspects of the social, political, economic, environmental, and cultural aspects of a community. This definition and the healthy communities model (Caton and Larsh, 2000) also serve to connect my research questions and the questions that I am beginning to formulate for my research interview protocol. My research questions add geography to the environment dimension, because of the potential connections with land, natural resources, and regional food production (Lyson, 2004), and rural communities as physical places (Orr, 2004; Wotherspoon, 1998).

Cultural factors – For this thesis I will draw on Brennan's (2001; 2008) emphasis on culture as it contributes to community identity, knowledge, values, and experience; it "facilitates common understandings, traditions, and values, all central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being," and contributes to building a sense of local identity and solidarity" (p. 1).

Economic factors - I define economic factors as jobs, labour market, skill training, and employment, as well as rural community economic development initiatives such as cooperatives or social enterprise (Canadian Rural Partnership, 2004; CCEDnet, 2009; Bartolic, 2005) rooted in broader social goals and enhanced rural sustainable development (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000; Lyson, 2004). The definition of economic factors for the purpose of this dissertation builds on leadership and participation in local economies, and a commitment to local resources as emphasized by the Canadian Community Economic Development network (CCED).

Education factors – I will focus on nonformal and adult education foundations in this thesis (Freire, 1993, 1998; Barkett and Cleghorn, 2007), but will also refer to formal school structures and supports, such as formal post-secondary options, as

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reasons that youth may leave rural communities. I also include factors such as well as high school experience and influences of teachers, community members and peers, to understand what may enhance or inhibit youth choices and mobility (Corbett, 2007; Looker, 2001).

Engagement – In the theoretical chapter I define engagement as active and sustained involvement. I elaborate on youth engagement as participation with adult partnership and support as key elements for success. This thesis will employ a definition of engagement that recognizes youth and adults as current stakeholders in rural communities. They have roles and responsibilities to be involved in all aspects of policy, programs, and decision making.

This definition of engagement recognizes the critical roles youth and adults play in understanding assets and challenges in rural communities, and the skills and leadership that they bring and may build by bridging intergenerational gaps (see also youth engagement as discussed by The Ontario Rural Council - TORC, 2007, and Resources on Youth-Adult Partnerships, Advocates for Youth Organization, 2001). Engagement for the purpose of this dissertation is connected to youth and adult partnerships based on mutual respect and mentoring, and builds on opportunities for participation in rural community life. These "spheres of participation" extend from private and public spaces with potential for local and global impacts from family, community, school, public policy decisions, and ultimately influencing broader society (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2005, Spheres of Participation based on The State of the World's Children, 2003, p.13).

Empowerment – The concept of empowerment is built on inclusion. It is a process that Taylor (2003) and Sousa (2006) claim includes three elements - political awareness of one's ability to make decisions that impact their lives; availability of options or choices to meet one's needs, and; opportunity to exercise rights and responsibility, and citizenship.

Factors – I will use the Oxford Dictionary definition of factor in this context as "a circumstance, fact, or influence that contributes to a result" and consider

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factors or influences that may be "relevant" to the discussion and decisions that impact rural areas (Oxford English Dictionary online, 2009).

Geographical (environmental) factors – Geographical/ environment will be defined here as physical places but with potential significance in the intersections of land, food production, agriculture, and people in a community (Lyson, 2004). I am most interested in the connections between where the respondents feel most at home in a physical space and how this might reflect their interests and values, their sense of place, rural identity and belonging.

Intergeneration – the **intergenerational dialogue framework** developed in this thesis will employ a definition of **intergenerational** as connecting older and younger generations. I use as a starting point the definition of **intergeneration** developed by Freechild youth education organization as elders, adults, youth, and children working together, sharing experiences and transferring knowledge so every new organizational effort can build on previous experiences and so communities can see their collective goals (Freechild, 2009). My intergenerational framework will involve generations of youth and adults learning together and exchanging ideas to build active rural communities, engaging community members in decision-making that directly affects their lives (UNESCO, 2002).

An intergenerational approach has been identified as important in four types of programs internationally, including 1) older people serving children and youth (as tutors, mentors, resource persons, coaches, friends, a grandparent raising a grandchild; 2) children and youth serving older people (as friendly visitors, companions and tutors); 3) older adults and youth collaborating in service to community (e.g. environmental and community development projects; and 4) older adults and youth together engaging in informal learning activities, (recreation, leisure, sports, art festivals, exhibitions (UNESCO, 2002). This research process aims to build on the concept of fourth type of initiative. Dialogue can connect youth and adults to impact the social, political, and economic realities of building healthy rural communities.

Mobility and Migration – The concept of mobility for this thesis is based on the Statistics Canada (2008) definition which concerns the movement of persons from one place to another. It includes persons who, in a specified reference period have not moved or have moved from one residence to another. The former are referred to as non-movers and the latter as movers. Movers include non-migrants and migrants.

Out-migration – When community members (often youth), leave rural communities for an urban center, this movement is defined by scholars as out-migration (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000). My research questions and interview protocol questions will examine social, economic, cultural, and environmental/geographical dimensions of out-migration. The literature reflects that out-migration is often linked to employment, training, and opportunity (Dupuy, Mayer, and Morissette, 2000), as well as kinship ties (Corbett, 2007). I am also interested in exploring how connections to place (Orr, 2004) and how rural identity may impact migration.

Rural Community Development - Acadia Centre for Rural Education and Sustainability (ACRES, 2009) provides an understanding of rural development and community development as an educational project in the broadest sense that includes but extends beyond the boundaries of formal educational institutions. This is the definition I will use for this dissertation. An expanded vision of what counts as "rural" beyond its traditional boundaries, spaces, places, and exclusive associations with agricultural communities is one that compliments this research.

This holistic vision of community development includes linkages between groups such as "university-based researchers, activists, practitioners and organizations working in issues of sustainability, management and governance in resource extractions communities, First Nations communities, rural schools, school boards and educational communities, institutions of government, and policy organizations" (A.C.R.E.S., 2009). This inclusive and inter-sectoral approach is one that resonates with my own experiences as an educator committed to rural communities - to understand and respond to broader educational issues

including ecological and environmental concerns, health and wellness, community economic development, social justice and community sustainability.

Rural – For this thesis, I will focus on rural communities of less than 2,000 people. Statistics Canada's Rural and Small Town Canada (RST) definition of rural includes communities outside the commuting zone of 10,000 residents (Statistics Canada, 2001). This is significant as my research focuses on rural communities beyond urban centres.

Sense of Place – Connection to physical space and community, ways of learning with/in this environment (Orr, 2004; Guenewald and Smith, 2008; Bartsch, 2008) and rural identity, including the geographical, environmental, and human interactions which I refer to as landscapes.

Social capital and social networks – Rural youth, whether they choose to stay, leave or return to rural communities, often have social or family connections to their communities, and may continue to refer to their rural community as home (Looker, 1993; 2001). These ties may influence decisions to stay or return (House, 1989). **Social networks** for the purpose of this thesis are defined as networks or bonds within the community, and relationships with family, community members, or peers.

Social factors – I define social factors as social connections, networks, or supports in the rural community (Looker, 2001; Corbett, 2007). (For example, groups in the community organized or school sports teams, 4-H, Scouts, church groups, as well as friends, family, educators, and social networking resources such as the internet or Facebook). What will be most significant to me is the meaning that these connections have for the youth, and how youth and adults perceive these networks. The following definitions are interconnected, reflecting how social factors, culture, economics, environment and agriculture are intrinsically linked (Westhues, 2003; Swift, Davies, Clarke, and Czerny, 2003; Epp, 2001; and Suzuki, 2005).

Sustainability - For the purpose of this thesis, I use the Brundtland Commission definition of sustainability to explore how rural community development might

best meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations, 1987).

Youth – A definition of youth is crucial. The ambiguity of what we term "youth" is a key challenge in identifying solutions to local issues. I will limit my definition of youth for this thesis to young people aged 18-30, extending to the upper age limit of youth as defined by Service Canada (2008) for their youth employment strategy, to ensure that they are the age of legal consent, and to understand a range of mobility factors at various stages of young people's lives.

Appendix B – Sample Consent Form

Enhancing Rural Communities through Education Policy and Community

Development

In my dissertation research I plan to explore how connecting youth and adults together in conversation about their rural community and their lives may help to understand the factors that promote or limit youth participation in rural communities in Alberta, and influence the migration of youth and young adults from rural into urban settings.

I am calling this an intergenerational dialogue framework (between youth and adults), and I am inviting you to be part of it! Thank you for contributing to this project.

Zane Hamm, researcher, University of Alberta

CONSENT FORM

The purpose of my research is to explore factors that promote or limit youth participation in rural communities in Alberta, and factors that influence the migration of youth and young adults from rural into urban settings.

The significance of this study lies in engaging youth in rural communities to impact the social, political, educational and economic realities of building healthy rural communities in Alberta.

I plan to assess factors promoting or limiting youth participation in rural communities by examining responses from youth and adults and explore a possible intergenerational connection.

Your responses will help me to understand the nature and extent of factors that promote or limit youth participation in rural communities in Alberta, and factors that influence the migration of youth and young adults from rural into urban settings. I then propose to assess the best approaches to address these factors. .

Thank you in advance for taking the time to meet with me. There are 3 steps to this project. First, the interview will take approximately 1 – 1.5 hours to complete. Next you will be paired as youth-adult pairs who will have an opportunity to interview each other with questions I will provide as an interview guide. Finally, you will also be invited to participate in a focus group dialogue that is intergenerational, including youth and adults. By filling out and submitting this form, you are consenting to participation in this research project. Data will be aggregated and made anonymous, so that identities of interview respondents will not be used in any reports or publications. For questions or concerns, contact Zane Hamm at zhamm@ualberta.ca.

Interviews and the focus group dialogue will be conducted by Zane Hamm, under the supervision of Dr. Jorge Sousa. The interview and dialogues will be audio recorded only with your permission.

Audio recordings and any written notes from this interview will be kept in a secure location, and only the researcher will have access to them. I am bound by confidentiality and anonymity. If you agree to have any portions of audio transcripts used in any future publications or presentations, please initial below. Uses of audio and visual data will again protect identities as much as possible.

You have the right to opt out of particular questions or withdraw from the interview process at any time.

If you have questions or concerns about the interview or the research project as a whole, please ask the interviewer at the time of the interview, or contact Zane Hamm at (780) 439-8764 or zhamm@ualberta.ca.

Consent

By signing below, I am indicating that I have read and understood the above information, and that I consent to participate in this research project.

_____   _____
             Interviewee's Name   Interviewee's Signature
             Date_____
Please initial below for any items to which you agree:
I give permission to be contacted for follow-up research. _____
I give permission for the researcher to use portions of audio transcripts in publications/presentations. _____
I give permission for my name and identity to be used in this research project. _____

Allow me to review transcripts first_____   Not necessary to review transcripts____

Signature of Researcher_____   Date_____

Appendix C – Sample Interview Protocol and Focus Group Dialogue

Enhancing Rural Communities through Education Policy and Community Development

In my dissertation research I plan to explore how an intergenerational dialogue framework (between youth and adults) may help to understand the factors that promote or limit youth participation in rural communities in Alberta, and influence the migration of youth and young adults from rural into urban settings.

The purpose of this research is to explore the social, economic, educational, geographical (environmental) and cultural factors that enable or inhibit youth engagement in rural communities. I will explore how educational policy and community development activities such as intergenerational mentorship can enhance rural community health and counter rural youth out-migration.

General: My research objectives will be accomplished by addressing the research question: How might an intergenerational dialogue framework enhance our understanding of the social, economic, educational, cultural and geographical (environmental) factors that influence rural youth migration?

Sub-questions

1.   What social, economic, educational, geographical (environmental) and cultural factors that enable or inhibit youth engagement in rural communities?

2.   What are the messages, (real or perceived), that youth receive about staying and participating in the daily economic, social, political and cultural life in their community?

3.   In what ways do youth/community leaders or mentors describe their individual/collective identity or responsibility in relation to this community?

4.   In what ways might social networks between youth/community leaders or mentors impact youth engagement in the rural community?

5.   How are the factors that may influence a younger generation of rural youth staying, leaving, or returning to their community identified by youth and adults/community leaders?

1. What social, economic, educational, geographical (environmental) and cultural factors that enable or inhibit youth engagement in rural communities?

Community Profile

♦   Tell me more about what it is like to live in this community. (benefits/challenges)

♦ What are the reasons that young people choose to stay here? Why might they choose to leave? Do many of them return? Why might they choose to return?

♦ How close are you to a larger urban center (access)? How much does that matter to you?

♦ Are there resources in urban centers that you wish you had in your own community?

a) Social

♦ Have you been part of any groups in the community? Any organized or school sports teams, 4-H, Scouts? Community organizations (boy scouts, church groups)?

♦ How important is your involvement with this group to you? What does that mean for you?

♦ What are your social connections in the community? Friends, Facebook/IT? Family, clubs?

2. What are the messages, (real or perceived), that youth receive about staying and participating in the daily economic, social, political and cultural life in their community?

♦ What messages do you receive from the adults in these groups related to staying, leaving, and returning?

♦ What messages do you get from your friends about staying or leaving (peer influences)?

♦ Do you plan to stay in this community? Do you plan to leave?

3. In what ways do youth/community leaders or mentors describe their individual/collective identity or responsibility in relation to this community?

♦ Who influences you the most when you make these decisions?

♦ What does *youth participation* mean to you? Youth *engagement*?

♦ To what extent do you feel a responsibility to this community? Can you describe this for me?

b) Economic

♦ Can you tell me about the main industries or jobs in your community?

♦ Are you working now?

♦ What is it like to work there? (the level of satisfaction with local jobs)

♦ What kinds of jobs have you had in the past?

♦ What is it like to find work here?

♦ Can you find the type of part-time job you want in this community?

♦ Do you feel that there are enough career opportunities to encourage you to consider staying in the community? If you could have your ideal career here, would you stay?

♦ Are there messages that you hear about being able to create your own jobs? Is there openness in the community to innovative work ideas?

c) Cultural

♦ Are you part of any cultural groups in the community?

♦ How important is your involvement with this group to you? What does that mean for you?

d) Geographical/environmental

♦ When you think about all of the different physical places that you have been, where do you feel most at home? (sense of place/rural identity/belonging)

♦ What would make someone feel like they belong here?

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4. In what ways do youth/community leaders or mentors describe their individual/collective identity or responsibility in relation to this community?

♦ Who do you feel closest to in the community?
♦ What are your connections in the community? What connections do you have outside the community?
♦ How do adult community leaders/mentors in influence how much you participate in community life? *(enhance or inhibit) youth engagement*
♦ Do you feel that you have more connections here in the community? Outside? Where? How? With whom?
♦ What do you like about your community?
♦ Do you feel that you belong in the community? What provides a sense of belonging?

How do educational experiences or policies enhance or inhibit rural youth engagement in the community?

♦ What is/was it like to go to school here?
♦ What does it mean to you to feel like you belong somewhere? Do/did you have that feeling in your school?
♦ Do you feel that you have supports in your school/community? What helps or would help you to feel supported?
♦ Are the students allowed to use the school after hours?
♦ Can you describe for me how you imagine your life? What are you hoping to do next?
♦ Do students have to leave the rural community if they want to continue their education?
♦ What are the messages about your community that you hear from your teachers? Counselor?
♦ Do you feel that it's better to leave or go? Come back?

> 5. How are the factors that may influence a younger generation of rural youth staying, leaving, or returning to their community identified by youth and adults/community leaders?

What role do adults/elders/educators play in addressing rural youth migration?

♦ What are the messages that you hear from your extended family? Are there different messages for different family members (gender)? Stay, go? Return?

♦ What are the messages that you hear from your family? Are there different messages for different family members (gender)? Stay, go? Return?

♦ What are the messages that you hear from friends? Stay, go? Return?

♦ What do you think your friends plan to do? What are their reasons for their choices?

♦ What are the messages you from your coaches, leaders?

♦ What are the messages that you hear from your teachers/guidance counselors?

♦ Which of these messages would you consider to be more important in your decision-making? (Creating bonds/ How strong and weak are they? How can they be augmented?)

♦ Who influences you in your community?

♦ With regard to the messages to return, what would encourage youth to return?

Is there anything else that you'd like to add or tell me?

Appendix D – Recruitment Poster

You are Invited to Participate
In a Research Study about
Rural Youth Migration and Learning between Youth and Adults

Enhancing Rural Communities through Education and Community Development Policy

Looking for youth (18-30), and adults (over 30) who are currently living in the community to participate in a research study

You would be asked to participate in an interview and 2 focus group dialogues. These are conversations with youth and adults in your community.

I am a graduate student in Adult Education at the University of Alberta
I am interested in knowing more about:

- Your experience living in your rural community
- The factors that impact your rural community
- How youth make decisions to stay, leave or return to rural communities
- In what ways youth and adults learn from each other about their community

You would be invited to participate in 2 evening sessions (about 1.5 hours each) that include:
- interviews – about 40 minutes each interview
- focus group conversations with youth and adults
- Snacks!

For more information, or to volunteer for this study, contact Zane at 780-XXX-XXXX or XXXXX@ualberta.ca
This research project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board.

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