COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES OF PARTNERING IN ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP:

BRINGING THEIR HEARTS

by

KATHERINE LYNN DAVIS

(Under the Direction of Aliki Nicolaides)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study employed a modified narrative inquiry methodology to understand the lived experiences of ten core participants in a partnership between a land-grant research university and a rural community in the southeastern United States. The purpose of this inquiry was to explore and describe partnering experiences in a community-engaged scholarship partnership in the rural South. The study was guided by a singular research question: What are the partnering experiences of rural Southern community partners and land-grant research university partners in a collective impact community-engaged partnership? The study findings highlighted the complex, relational matrix of a collective impact initiative and were ultimately focused on partnering within the community rather than between the community and the university. Thematic narrative analysis revealed four narrative threads in the study participants’ experiences: Creating Community, Embracing Diversity, Establishing Boundaries and Expectations, and Sustaining the Partnership. The conclusions drawn from the findings centered in: (a) the need for mediating intersects of power and reciprocity among partners within the community, (b) enacting partnering values of diversity and inclusion that are constrained
by galvanized normative social values, (c) cultivating community capacities for administering backbone organization roles for partnership sustainability, and (d) employing public narrative and narrative inquiry methods of practice and research in community-engaged scholarship. Recommendations for further community-engaged scholarship research included: a) exploring the implications of establishing boundaries and expectations within the community, (b) expanding the types of community-engaged partnerships and study participants included in the study, (c) assessing the extent and impacts of limited diversity and inclusion on community-engaged partnering, (d) evaluating the outcomes of public narrative and narrative inquiry practices and research on community-engaged partnerships, and (e) a deeper analysis of the intersects of power and reciprocity and their impacts on types of community-engaged partnerships and stages of engagement. This study provides a narrow glimpse into the complex, relational partnering experiences that shape a collective impact community-engaged scholarship partnership between a land-grant research university and a rural Southern community.

INDEX WORDS: Community-engaged scholarship, higher education engagement, narrative inquiry, partnering, power, public narrative, reciprocity
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DEDICATION

My doctoral dissertation is dedicated to all the women in my mother’s family who have nurtured me, watched over me, chastised me, taught me, led me, spurred me on, and always, always, validated my worth. Without your watchful eyes and spirits, and your strong narratives of love and encouragement, I would not have aspired to, much less attained, this mountain top. I only hope my achievement reflects well on you, since I stand on your strong shoulders. I firmly believe deep in my soul that you are why my doctoral degree is possible: Mary Maddox Murdock, Nancy Jane Murdock Hackney, Nell Rose Murdock Hall, Berniece Rose Hackney Hogan, Beulah Hobby Hackney, Carolyn Jean Hackney Ward, Barbara Jane Hackney Thomason, my little sister, Jan Carrol Davis Layton (1957-1991), my sister-in-law, Linda T. Davis, and my nieces, Kristen Clark Davis, Mary Elizabeth Davis Kerrigan, and Stephanie Lynn Davis, and mostly my hero, my mother, Mary Katherine Hogan Davis. I want to offer special tributes to Nancy B. Heath (1934-2009), who encouraged me as a teenager and young adult to follow my dreams, and my sister-in-law, Sylvia Yvonne Bohon Davis (1952-2012), who was one of the greatest champions of my PhD to the very last days of her life. And, finally, I dedicate this arduous work to my soulmate, my mainstay, my motivation, Mary Phyllis Grimes, the strongest, kindest, most tolerant woman I know.
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From beginning to end, first, last, and foremost, my gratitude is offered to God.

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you?

To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Micah 6:8
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What can we learn from people who are living community-engagement partnering? Would understanding how partners engage with one another in their partnering experiences (versus what they are doing in technical processes and procedures) further inform community-engagement practice and theory? How might authentic partnering narratives inform those of us who wish to be more effective in our community-engagement scholarship and practices? Connecting, collaborating, consensus-building, dialoging, deliberating, and decision-making are all descriptions used to define partnering actions and activities in higher education community-engaged scholarship (CES). Yet these descriptors do not tell us what is really happening on the ground, in the community, between the people from the campus and the community who are working to improve the quality of their collective public life.

Community-engaged scholars and practitioners have researched and written extensively about best-practices for building partnerships between higher education institutions and local communities, but only rarely does the literature offer experiences lived within partnering from which we can learn. While scholars are busy talking about community engagement, we miss out on learning from those who are busy living community engagement. Most people who are involved in CES have no knowledge of, or concern about, the academic term; they are simply doing what they believe to be best for
their community when the opportunity to access higher education resources became available to them. Considerations of the meanings and practices of lived partnering experiences in CES were at the core of this study, which explored narratives of partnering between and among community and campus partners and contemplated how these narratives might be instructive for those of us who intend to be more effective in our engagement practices and scholarship.

A modified narrative inquiry qualitative methodology offered me an opportunity to learn alongside those who are living the practices of community engagement. Instead of positioning myself outside of community engagement and talking about the partners’ and their stories, this study was designed to enter the partners’ stories with them through a process of several rounds of inquiry that explored their public narratives of Self, Us, and Now (Ganz, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011).

The study was focused within a project initiated by a land-grant research university partnering with a rural community in the southeastern United States. The lived and learning experiences of the community and university partners were explored in the midst of their work together to create and sustain a CES collective impact initiative, in which multiple public and private entities were involved (Kania & Kramer, 2011). The inquiry was guided by a singular research question: What are the partnering experiences of rural Southern community partners and land-grant research university partners in a collective impact CES partnership?

**Background of the Problem**

Higher education in the United States emerged from the need for an educated citizenry in the new democracy to serve the larger purpose of the public good (Shapiro,
In concert with the original purposes of adult education and literacy, the purposes of higher education have included educating citizens to participate in democratic process designed for addressing our common concerns (Kellogg Commission, 2001). In the 20th century, higher education began to close itself off from society to focus more on research and developing its own disciplines (Boyer, 1996a; Cox, 2010) while society on the whole began to flounder in the ambiguities created by exponentially increased technology and globalized economies (Nicolaiades & McCallum, 2013; Stanton, 2012). In recent decades there has been a demand for higher education to transform the standards and practices by which it accomplishes its traditional three-pronged mission of teaching, research, and service to engage with the communities it serves in addressing the social concerns we all hold in common (Cox, 2010).

The Kellogg Commission recommended shifting the concepts that define the mission of public higher education from the traditional models of teaching, research, and service to those of learning, discovery, and engagement (2001, p. 27). Following the Commission’s recommendation, this study employs the terms learning and discovery instead of teaching and research to identify higher education’s academic purposes implemented within engagement.

Other advocates for transforming higher education have suggested more far-reaching changes in order for higher education to “return to its roots” of serving the public good (Kellogg Commission, 2001). Scholars are “increasingly challenging the traditional structures of higher education and calling for a new kind of higher education system that ensures full alignment with the needs of a 21st-century society” (Sandmann, Furco, & Adams, 2016, p. 2)
Subsequently, there has been “. . . a kind of revolution in higher education, nationally and globally, in which universities are reinventing the way they fulfill their core purposes . . .” (Saltmarsh, 2008, p. 64). Higher education, as a social institution, is beginning to champion learning and discovery that employs community-engagement practices to address complex social issues (Sherman & Torbert, 2000; Stanton, 2012; Yapa, 2009). As a method for meeting higher education’s mission, CES is intrinsically focused on transforming the way knowledge is created and consumed (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), and holistic models for promoting CES in higher education have been recommended (Franz, 2009).

Engagement is moving toward the center of higher education practices (Fitzgerald, Bruns, Sonka, Furco, & Swanson, 2012), and is now considered to be “one of higher education’s most influential reform agendas” (Sandmann et al., 2016, p. 2). This study was particularly interested in the lived experiences of partners as higher education institutions engage with communities for the purpose of transforming the cultures of both. To learn with community partners, we might benefit from hearing their partnering stories and understanding their public narratives (Ganz, 2011).

**Terminology**

Variously called service-learning, civic engagement, democratic engagement, public engagement, scholarship of engagement, engaged scholarship, community engagement, and community-engaged scholarship (for a few examples), the field of higher education engagement (Sandmann et al., 2016) has responded to the challenge for increased effectiveness in learning and discovery while synergistically being more responsive and relevant to the needs of communities and society. The various labels
indicate different purposes or foci of practice, but in general signify a continuum of educational practices (or pedagogies) that have a common principle—that of higher education institutions engaging with communities to address social concerns as a method for meeting their primary missions of learning and discovery. This study will use the term community-engaged scholarship (CES) to refer to the continuum of types of engaged scholarship, unless referencing a usage in the literature, while recognizing the term higher education engagement is more current and encompassing vernacular

In CES literatures, communities are defined as neighborhoods, municipalities, organizations, industries, social institutions, or focus of social concern; and are located in local, regional, national, global, or virtual settings. Further, the campus refers to diverse types of higher education institutions, both private and public, urban and rural, from community colleges and regional liberal arts colleges to large research universities. Across all types, locations, and combinations of community-campus partnerships, there remains a central concern within CES that underscores the manner and extent to which campuses engage with their communities. As the Kellogg Commission noted:

Engagement goes well beyond extension, conventional outreach, and even most conceptions of public service. Inherited concepts emphasize a one-way process in which the university transfers its expertise to key constituents. Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity. (2001, p. 13)

By engagement, the Kellogg Commission envisioned partnerships, that is, two-way streets, defined by mutual respect and esteem among the partners; there are no experts on campuses who should be treated deferentially by communities.
Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) expanded the notion of engagement into a holistic eco-system paradigm, meaning the campus is but one component of a larger democratic community system with each component impacting the others. They distinguish between engagement that is focused on *activity and place* from that which is focused on *purpose and process* and emphasize a shared responsibility for the co-creation of knowledge between and among engagement partners (p. 22). They describe engagement in an eco-system paradigm as a civic and democratic process between and among community and campus, with all partners having equal access and voice in the process.

**Definitions**

Engaged scholarship is concerned with transforming higher education to meet its original purposes for educating citizens to participate in civic and democratic learning (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), while also meeting its core missions of learning, discovery, and engagement. The Carnegie Foundation’s community-engagement classification of higher education institutions provides a more comprehensive definition:

Community engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership of college and university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values
and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good. (n.d., para. 1-2)

As noted in the Carnegie Foundation’s definition and extensively in the literature, to be considered community-engaged scholarship, the practices of mutual-benefit and reciprocal partnership, along with the three-pronged mission of higher education, must be evident in the project. Sandmann (2008) cited the occurrence in the literature of “. . . two grounding principles of engaged scholarship: (a) mutually beneficial, reciprocal partnerships and (b) integration of teaching, research, and service” (p. 96).

The campus must engage with the community in a mutually-beneficial and reciprocal partnership to be considered as community engaged. Further, to be considered as scholarship, the engagement must include practices and application of learning and discovery. Finally, those research projects which are investigations designed to more fully understand community engagement, as this study proposed to do, are considered to be CES, or sometimes referred to as the scholarship of engagement.

The Academy of Community Engagement Scholarship provides this description of higher education community engagement, emphasizing its scholarly characteristics:

Community engagement scholarship focuses on ideas and raises questions that are important to communities and educational institutions. The work is carried out in a mutually beneficial, collaborative manner. Achievements include the co-creation of significant, creative, original, and conceptually-guided engagement through globally and locally relevant activities that systematically advance practice, teaching and learning, and/or research. Community engagement scholarship is documented, publicly shared, and reviewed through various
mechanisms, including: presentations, publications, professional practice, creative work, and including news and other media. (n.d., para. 2)

As mentioned above, this study will use the term CES to refer to the continuum of types of engaged scholarship.

**Community-Engaged Partnerships**

The goals of CES partnerships are as varied as the partnerships and projects themselves. Community-engaged partnerships can range from short-term service-learning projects to long-term collective impact initiatives focused on social change (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Himmelman (2001) identified CES that had short-term purposes as *community betterment*, whereas CES with purposes which focus on shifts in power for social change were identified as *community empowerment*. Successful CES partnerships, as defined by this study, are reciprocal and meet mutually agreed-upon goals. Depending on the type, CES may also co-create possibilities for sustained engagement as theorized by Hoyt (2011) and conditions for transformation of higher education and society (see Chapter 2 for further discussion).

For the purposes of this study, which intended to look beyond community betterment toward community empowerment, a successful CES partnership will include the following two distinct characteristics integrated into the project: (a) mutual-benefit and reciprocity for all partner entities (i.e., *engagement*); and, (b) integration of learning and discovery (i.e., *scholarship*). By definition, therefore, a successful CES project would be mutually-beneficial for the various partner entities, and develop reciprocal, engaged, sustained partnerships. Those partnerships would be effective for higher
education learning and discovery, and significantly, meet the goals that have been agreed-up for the CES project.

**Overview of the Literatures**

An expanding body of research on CES since 1990 has provided theoretical constructions of the relational conditions for creating effective community-engaged partnerships (Dostilio et al., 2012; Hoyt, 2011; Stanton, 2008). Collaboration, trust, mutual benefit, reciprocity and partnership all highlight the primacy of relationships in engaged scholarship (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010; Enos & Morton, 2003; Hoyt, 2011; Janke, 2008; Leiderman, Furco, Zapf, & Goss, 2002; Sandy & Holland, 2006). The literature has provided a conceptual understanding of what engagement means (Academy of Community Engagement Scholarship, n.d.; Carnegie Foundation, n.d.; Fitzgerald, et al., 2012; Kellogg Commission, 2001); what reciprocity means (Dostilio, et al., 2012; Hoyt, 2011; Janke, 2008; Saltmarsh, Hartley & Clayton, 2009); typologies of partnerships (Clayton, et al., 2010; Enos & Morton, 2003); and types of power-sharing (Himmelman, 2001; Rowlands, 1997; Saltmarsh, 2008). However, the field of higher education engagement was lacking an in-depth narrative exploration focused on experiences between and among partners which might inform implementation of engagement practices and the development of theory.

We needed richer descriptions of lived experiences in CES partnering, and how those experiences impact the partnership. A gap in the literature was a narrative description of the complex, muddled, relational, reciprocal, and possibly transformational engagement experienced between and among partners in a successful CES partnership.
Statement of the Problem

Higher education engagement advocates for learning and discovery that employs community-engagement practices to address complex social issues (Sherman & Torbert, 2000; Stanton, 2012; Yapa, 2009). CES has become an increasingly significant approach by which higher education builds collaborative partnerships with communities to address the exponentially expanding social, political, economic, and moral challenges of the 21st Century (Stanton, 2012). Engagement is moving toward the center of higher education practices (Fitzgerald et al., 2012). The purpose of CES is to enrich learning, discovery, outreach and creative activity, to strengthen democratic values, and to contribute to the public good. Those purposes are achieved through the reciprocal partnering of college and university knowledge and resources with those of public and private entities, labeled in this study as community-campus partnerships.

Research on CES has explored various factors and theories involved in building successful community-campus partnerships, (Enos & Morton, 2003; Fitzgerald, Burack, Seifer & Votruba, 2010). Building partnerships that nurture generative reciprocity and democratic power-sharing has been identified as essential for the success of transformational CES projects (Hoyt, 2011). While the literature has much to say about the importance of building partnerships in sustained engagement, there are few studies that describe the complex, muddled, lived experiences and practices of the partners as they learned together to co-create a mutually beneficial, reciprocal, CES partnership.

While scholars have theoretical understandings of community-engagement and have identified best-practices for how to build engagement partnerships, a gap in our literature was narrative understandings and descriptions of how CES partnering is
experienced between and among partners over the dimensions of time, relational spaces, and place (Clandinin, 2013)

**Purpose of the Study**

The inquiry purpose of this study was to explore and describe partnering experiences in a community-engaged scholarship partnership in the rural South. The practical purposes were to inform university research partners about how they might better support developing partnerships, and to reflectively inform the research site local Partnership about its own development. The academic purpose was to fill a gap in the community-engaged scholarship literature, which is lacking in research exploring community-engaged community partners' public narratives (Ganz, 2011) and partnering experiences, and particularly lacking in studies that employ narrative inquiry methodologies.

This study was neither designed to answer theoretical questions nor to solve a specific puzzle; it was intended to tell authentic stories of how people experienced partnering with one another in a community-engaged partnership. The research site was chosen because it represented a certain type of partnering—that of CES—which was built upon mutual benefit and reciprocity and had proven to be successful in many of its collective impact endeavors. My aim was to tell the partnering stories of a partnership that has a reputation for reciprocity and meeting agreed-upon goals. By applying the conceptual lens of public narratives of *Self, Us, Now* (Ganz, 2009, 2011), this study inquired into the ways partnering experiences shaped this established partnership.
Significance of the Study

A narrative inquiry study into the relational experiences of partnering contributes to theories and practices for building community engagement, as well as extending the context for application of narrative inquiry methodology. In practical applications, the narratives of partnership leaders in a successful community-engaged project provide a more complete representation of how partners cultivate the conditions for building effective community-engaged partnerships. Narrative descriptions of the lived experiences of the partners in a successful CES partnership contribute to the knowledge-base of best-practices for intentionally and effectively recognizing and employing productive partnering within CES partnerships.

In praxis—that is, the bridging of theory and practice—this study may prove beneficial for CES partners to recognize: (a) how their lived experiences might be further clarified by constructs of CES, and (b) how CES constructs and learning emerge from their lived experiences. Narrative inquiry can assist in examining how the stories we live by contribute to our understandings of ourselves and others; those understandings, in turn cultivate the creation of new stories to live by. In this study, as the inquiry progressed the process of narrative inquiry and the telling and re-telling of public narratives served as a practice for strengthening partnering relationships—a praxis in action.

Lastly, this study’s application of narrative inquiry methodology in the field of higher education engagement represents a contribution to the expansion of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology in the social sciences.
Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I have: (a) described and defined the landscape of engaged scholarship within higher education for the purposes of this study; (b) provided an overview of the CES literature, (c) noted the lack of narrative inquiry into partnering experiences in CES, and (d) stated the purposes and proposed significance of the study. In the next chapter, I will dive deeper into the CES literature, describing the literatures that frame the study, which emerged from a synthesis of: the foundations of CES, concepts of power and reciprocity, and typologies of CES partnerships.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study focused on a sustained CES partnership initiated by a land-grant research university partnering with a rural community in the southeastern United States. The inquiry explored the lived and learning experiences of both the community and the university partners to understand how partners engage the project and one another rather than what they are doing together in technical processes and procedures. Modified to accommodate design limitations, a narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin, 2013) was employed, which allowed for the experiential dimensions of time, relational space, and contextual place in participants’ narratives.

The methodological approach used was not one of thinking about stories; rather, it was one of thinking with stories, that is, narratives are both the primary methodology and the subject of the study (Clandinin, 2013). The metaphor of jumping into a river comes to mind. The streams of water (partnering experiences) were flowing downstream and the researcher jumped into the flow at a particular point, swimming along in the streams for a time as the water continued in its flow. After a time, the researcher left the river, having learned with the stories that were told and retold, lived and relived during the time the researcher was swimming along with the river, while the water continues to flow on. Narrative methodology is therefore ontologically different from other qualitative methodologies, such as case study, for instance. A case study is analogous to taking a
photograph of the river and inspecting the contents of the photo. Narrative inquiry takes seriously the epistemology of knowing and learning within lived experiences.

Ganz’ (2009, 2011) constructs of public narrative comprised by stories of Self, Us, and Now were employed both to frame the inquiry process and as a theoretical lens to interpret the data. The partnering stories of Self, Us, and Now, learned as the researcher was swimming along with the participants—rather than specific, targeted, collected data—were the focus, or subject of the study; thus, narrative was both the methodology and the subject of the study.

**Conceptual Framing of the Literature**

The conceptual frame of the literature assisted with bounding the inquiry. As I began this study, three primary bodies of literature informed and framed my thinking: (a) foundations of CES, (b) the intersects of power and reciprocity in CES, and (c) partnership constructs in CES.

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*Figure 1. Three overlapping bodies of literature frame this inquiry.*
As depicted in Figure 1, the theoretical concepts and practices in each area overlap and influence the other areas, and I began to wonder how these theories might inform experiences of partnering in community engagement, and conversely, how partnering experiences might further inform these theories and concepts. In this chapter, I will review the salient aspects of these three areas of literature and discuss ways in which they frame this study.

Community-Engaged Scholarship

The concept of CES was originally articulated by Boyer in 1990, as President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and was expanded in his 1995 report, *The Scholarship of Engagement* (1996a). “I'm convinced,” he claimed, “that in the century ahead, higher education in this country has an urgent obligation to become more vigorously engaged in the issues of our day, just as the land-grant colleges helped farmers and technicians a century ago” (p. 28).

In his previous and subsequent papers and speeches, Boyer (1990, 1996a, 1997) voiced his concern that the academy had become irrelevant to the nation’s most pressing problems and proposed that higher education transform itself to return to its roots (Kellogg Commission, 2001) by joining forces with communities to address their mutual social concerns. As an educator, Boyer was particularly troubled by faltering public schools, however, he was concerned about the myriad of wicked problems we would face in 21st century society and challenged higher education to engage with communities to realize practicable and effective transformations within both higher education institutions and society.
Following Boyer’s lead, proponents of CES began to advocate that higher education has a responsibility for collaborating with communities to maximize both community and campus assets for addressing our common social concerns. Over the subsequent decades, the field of higher-education engagement has “developed, evolved, and matured . . . to become a codified field of study and practice” (Sandmann et al., 2016, p. 6), with a large body of research and practice literature to guide future engagement.

While the practices of CES lie on a continuum that includes service-learning projects on one end to long-term collective impact initiatives on the other, there is agreement in the discipline that several principles must be in place for what is typically identified as community service to be considered engaged scholarship. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Carnegie Foundation’s community-engagement classification of higher education institutions (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.) provided a clear and inclusive definition. Notable in the Carnegie Foundation definition of CES are the existence of both mutual benefit and reciprocal partnership.

The impetus of engaged scholarship is the attempt to transform public higher education from a late-20th century social institution that “has evolved into an enterprise too narrowly focused on the scholarship of discovery” (Marullo & Edwards, 2000, p. 895) to institutions that are “reshaped as they enter into collaborative arrangements with community partners to address pressing social, political, economic, and moral ills” (p. 896). As noted previously, engaged scholarship is further concerned with transforming higher education to meet its original purposes for educating citizens—those on campus and off—to participate in civic and democratic learning (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011).
In their edited book, *To Serve a Larger Purpose*, Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) propose that higher education is part of a larger social eco-system within which it has impacts and is impacted by all other social entities. They suggest CES is a movement in higher education toward recognizing and acting within the realities of these existing connections.

**Mutual Benefit, Reciprocity, and Scholarship**

As previously discussed in the Definitions Section in Chapter 1, to be considered *community-engaged scholarship*, the practices of mutual-benefit and reciprocal partnership, along with the three-pronged mission of higher education, must be evident in the project. For the project to be considered as *community-engagement*, the campus must engage with the community in a mutually-beneficial and reciprocal partnership. Further, to be considered as *scholarship*, the engagement must include practices and applications of learning and discovery. Those research projects that are designed to more fully understand community engagement, are referred to as the scholarship of engagement.

**Constructivist Epistemologies in Higher Education**

Community-engaged scholarship (CES) has been considered a response to the status quo epistemologies (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011, p. 15) that became entrenched in higher education in the 20th century. Through fostering deliberative democracy, reciprocity, and transformative learning, Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) proposed one of the primary purposes of CES is to shift the epistemologies of higher education and communities. While a bifurcation of epistemologies is simplistic, CES is committed to transforming higher education by realizing a shift from those types of positivist epistemologies that privilege “expert-driven, hierarchical knowledge generation and
dissemination” (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011, p. 16) to types of constructivist epistemologies that privilege subjective, contextual co-creation of knowledge within partnerships that are crafted between campuses and communities. Schön (1995) describes the enactment of CES within higher education as an *epistemological battle* between practices based in *technical rationality* and those based in constructive reflection (p. 35).

Building on Dewey’s pragmatism (Saltmarsh, 2008; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011; Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011), CES has broadened to be applied as a pedagogy that informs the core missions of learning, discovery, and outreach in higher education. As Weerts and Sandmann (2008) note:

> The new philosophy emphasizes a shift away from an expert model of delivering university knowledge to the public and toward a more collaborative model in which community partners play a significant role in creating and sharing knowledge to the mutual benefit of institutions and society” (p. 74).

Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) understand reciprocity to situate persons with whom they partner in the community “not just as consumers of knowledge and services but also as participants in the larger public culture of democracy” (p. 21). They bring into focus the intersects of the basic principles of CES—that is, mutual benefit, reciprocity, and ways of knowing.

Lorlene Hoyt (2011) echoes the challenge that “we need an epistemology for our time” (p. 285). She recommended “an epistemology of reciprocal knowledge, realized through a two-way network of human relationships” (p. 285). Hoyt’s epistemology informed her experiences in developing a theory of CES that entails five stages on a continuum of engagement, supported by epistemological shifts from within the university
and extended into engagement with the community. Hoyt’s theory will be discussed in the Partnership Constructs section of this Chapter under Stages of Engagement.

**Intersects of Power and Reciprocity**

Trust, cooperation, collaboration, mutual benefit, partnership, reciprocity, and power encapsulate the primacy of relationships in CES which is noted throughout the literature (Brukardt, Holland, Percy, & Zimpher, 2006; Clayton et al., 2010; Enos & Morton, 2003; Hoyt, 2011; Janke, 2008; Leiderman et al., 2003; Sandmann & Kliewer, 2012; Sandy & Holland, 2006). The primacy of relationships in CES was aptly summarized by Hoyt (2011) when she stated that “human relationships, particularly those that are resilient and capable of thriving through adversity, are the most critical element for achieving sustained engagement” (p. 282, italics added). As her theory of engagement proposed, resilient relationships are not automatic, rather they are developed in stages of reciprocity over time that ideally culminate in power shifts that generate transformations in higher education and society.

**Meanings of Reciprocity in Community-Engaged Scholarship**

Even though scholars and practitioners of CES have been considering reciprocity between universities and communities for several decades (Cox, 2010, p. 27), the meanings of reciprocity, as well as the structures and conditions for the experience of reciprocity in community-engagement partnerships continue to be deliberated. A definitive definition of reciprocity is elusive—almost as if it is a sensitizing concept (Patton, 2002, pp. 456-457) that draws discussion and consideration, but cannot be determined with one singular definition.
Part of the elusiveness of its definition is because reciprocity is both process and outcome in partnerships, and partly because it is often conflated with mutual benefit in theory and practice (Sandmann & Kliwer, 2012). Conversely, it seems the construct of mutual benefit—generally understood as a complementarity or as an exchange of benefits—is less complex and more easily grasped, which may explain why mutual benefit is generally the assumed definition of reciprocity. There are, however, more nuanced understandings of reciprocity in the CES literature.

Dostilio et al. (2012) highlighted three orientations of reciprocity in the literature: exchange, or mutual benefit; influence, or impacting decisions; and generative, or synergistic action. Janke and Clayton (2011) note that beyond mutual benefit, high-quality community/campus partnerships are reciprocal . . . Reciprocity can be defined as the recognition, respect, and valuing of the knowledge, perspective, and resources that each partner contributes to the collaboration . . . It is distinct from mutual benefit as it moves beyond expectations of complementarity to reposition power. (p. 3)

Within their definition of reciprocity, Janke and Clayton underscore the intersects of power with reciprocity in CES.

Meanings of Power in Community-Engaged Scholarship

In this study, the concept of power in CES partnerships will be used as described by Himmelman (2001) as the “capacity to produce intended results” (p. 278). Himmelman offers the concept of a continuum of engagement based on motives in the partnership that range from collaborative betterment to collaborative empowerment.

Himmelman maintains that collaborative betterment initiatives do not include an interest
in equalizing the power relations between entities (similar to transactional partnerships discussed in the Partnership Constructs section in this Chapter). Collaborative empowerment, however, begins inside a community that establishes its own equitable power relations and invites other entities to partner with it to reach the community’s goal for itself.

The “capacity to produce intended results,” or power, is the distinguishing characteristic between collaborative betterment and collaborative empowerment. Shifts from collaborative betterment to collaborative empowerment would necessitate implementation of democratic processes and shifts in power within a community. Himmelman (2001) posited that equalizing power relations in partnerships requires practices of deliberative democracy within the community. That is, “power . . . must be guided by principles and practices of democratic governance, grassroots leadership development, and community organizing” (p. 278). According to Himmelman, equitable power in CES partnerships would mean that all partners share both the responsibility and the accountability to co-create the project by resource-sharing, consensus-building, and decision-making.

While not situated explicitly in CES, Jo Rowlands’ (1997) engagement with women in Honduras informs considerations of power in partnering by exploring uses and understandings of the concept of empowerment in social action. She distinguished between differing types and spaces of control as manifestations or enactments of power. Rowlands described power over as controlling, power with as collaborative, power to as creative, and power within as agency, or empowerment. She also emphasized that empowerment must be attained not only personally, but also socially and systemically,
and that shifts in systemic power cannot be maintained unless there are shifts in personal empowerment experienced by the individuals involved in the system. In other words, according to Rowlands, both organizational and personal transformation is required for power to be shifted and for social change to be sustained.

**Reciprocity Repositions Power**

Theoretically, as reciprocity (as a process) develops and partners experience respect, trust, and confidence in themselves and each other, power and control shift to become more equitable. Iteratively, as power and control shift, reciprocity (as an outcome) develops, and possibilities for generative action among partners are opened. As mentioned previously, Janke and Clayton (2011) noted that reciprocity “moves beyond expectations of complementarity to reposition power” (p. 3).

Mutual benefit is a complementarity in a partnership, whereas, reciprocity effects uses of power in a partnership. Ideally in practice, as reciprocity becomes more generative and power distinctions break down, identity becomes a *shared we* (Janke, 2008): everyone involved becomes both teachers and learners (Jacoby, 2003), and the co-creation of knowledge emerges. Himmelman (2001) and Rowlands (1997) both suggest that the repositioning of power must occur within the community and within individuals, as well as between *experts* and *lay people*.

**Public Narratives at the Intersects of Power and Reciprocity**

Drawing from his extensive experiences in social action movements such as the civil rights movement in Mississippi, the United Farm Workers in California, and the Obama Election Campaign, Marshall Ganz (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) developed a concept of public narrative to assist in training social movement leaders. Defining
leadership as “enabling others to achieve purpose in the face of uncertainty” (2008, para. 2), Ganz recommended leadership practices of building relationships, telling stories, devising strategies, and taking action (2010).

This study draws explicitly on Gantz’ constructs of public narrative, or “the discursive means we use to access values that equip us with the courage to make choices under conditions of uncertainty, to exercise agency” (2011, p. 274). Note, as discussed in Chapter 1, that agency can be understood as power within, per Jo Rowlands (1997) and intersects with generative reciprocity among partners, per Dostilio, et al. (2012).

Ganz (2008) described public narrative as a skillful art of leadership that includes three story components: Self, Us, and Now. A story of Self narrates who we are as individuals—our experiences and reasons for why we act. A story of Us narrates our shared values and experiences, and explains why we act collectively. A story of Now “transforms the present into a moment of challenge, hope, and choice” (para. 4).

Employing public narrative as a leadership practice that motivates action based on values, Ganz notes: “[T]o answer the why question—why does it matter, why do we care, why do we risk action—we turn to narrative” (2011, p. 275). For Ganz, narrative engages the heart and stirs the motivation for action; narrative identifies the Self, develops the Us, and motivates action in the Now.

Applying Gantz’ constructs of Self, Us, Now in this study allowed for building a bridge between practices of power and reciprocity enacted through public narrative and the constructs of power and reciprocity from which those practices were formulated. As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, this study engaged Ganz’ public narrative concepts to structure the inquiry process and analyze the data.
Partnership Constructs

Typically, both the practices and the theories employed in CES use the term “partnership” to characterize the relational frame of CES projects; there has been in-depth discussion about building diverse types of partnerships involved in CES. The literature is replete with technical explanations, analogies, and typologies of CES partnerships, however, when I began researching this project, no narrative inquiry study of the lived and learning experiences of sustained-engagement partnering had been published.

My use of the gerund “partnering” holds phenomenological experiences in consideration and accentuates ways of being together in the partnership, rather than focusing on the technological processes of building partnerships. I use the gerund to guide my inquiry because I am curious about revealing how partners are being together adaptively in sustained engagement rather than what they are doing together in technical processes and procedures.

Typologies of Partnerships

CES inherently focuses on transforming the way knowledge is created and consumed (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011), not only on what we know, but on the ways in which we know, create, and share knowledge; thus, those CES partnerships that reach such a goal are considered “transformational,” while those that are focused on more immediate goals are considered “transactional” (Clayton et al., 2010; Enos & Morton, 2003).

By appropriating the differentiation that Burns (1978) made between transactional and transformational leadership, Enos and Morton (2003) identified a similar distinction in CES partnerships. They described transactional partnerships as those that are
instrumental in nature and that are generally framed to meet limited tasks, outcomes, calendars, and budgets. Transactional partnerships are likely to be a more functionally beneficial partnership framework for community and university partners who are focused on responding to a particular need in a community: providing a research site for data collection, teaching the application of a particular discipline, or serving to enhance experiences of civic engagement for all involved. Once the goals are reached, the partnership dissolves and the need for sustainability becomes moot.

Transformational partnerships, in contrast, are those in which “persons come together in more open-ended processes . . . to explore emergent possibilities, revisit and revise their own goals and identities, and develop systems they work within beyond the status quo” (Clayton et al., 2010, p. 7-8). Transformational partnerships in CES focus on sustained social change, which requires shifts in power among the partners and in the community, and thus are multilayered, complex, and risky for partners who are fully committed to the goals. Transformational partnerships, theoretically, are sustained-engagement partnerships (Hoyt, 2011).

Partnerships, in reality, lie somewhere on the continuum between transactional and transformational. They might also be considered exploitive (Clayton et al., 2010) or transitional—that is, moving from transactional to transformational, or back (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi, & Herremans, 2010). As Clayton et al. (2010) note, planning for a transformational partnership when it is not appropriate for the project at hand might do more harm than good (p. 18).

Finally, the substance of partnerships, as in all relationships, is developmental. The primary contrasts between transactional and transformational partnerships lie in the
intentions of the partners, the quality of reciprocity, and the equity of power in the relationships. Dostilio et al. (2012) note that generative reciprocity in relationships opens up the possibility “to move relationships from being understood by what we do together to being understood by how we are together” (p. 25). Those experiences that reveal how partners are together in engagement partnering are the focus of this study.

**Stages of Engagement**

Specifically drawing from Schön’s (1995) understanding of “practice as a setting not only for the application of knowledge but [also] for its generation” (p. 29), Hoyt’s (2011) theory of stages of engagement emerged from a sustained city-community project she initiated as faculty in the Department of Urban Studies at MIT. She described the stages of community engagement over time as: (a) pseudo-engagement, (b) tentative engagement, (c) stable engagement, (d) authentic engagement, and (e) sustained engagement. In sustained engagement, “the partnership gains power through the mutual accrual of knowledge . . . toward real social change” (Hoyt, 2011, pp. 273-278). Hoyt’s theory of engagement reflects the dialectics between mutual benefit, reciprocity, scholarship, epistemology, power, partnering, and social action. Based in a relational epistemology, Hoyt’s stages of engagement reflect partnering as a reciprocal process within stages of mutually-shared power. For Hoyt, CES reaches its full potential in the co-creation of knowledge, which ultimately aims toward impacting social change. She identifies transformational engagement as sustained engagement within resilient relationships that enact the intersects of generative reciprocity and equitable power-sharing among all partners.
Summary

The literatures that initially frame this inquiry are those that explore: (a) the foundations of CES, (b) the intersects of power and reciprocity in CES, and (c) partnership constructs in CES. As discussed, the theoretical concepts and practices in each area overlap and influence the other areas. As recommended by Davis, Kliewer, and Nicolaides (2017), a clear understanding of the intersects of power and reciprocity—and mediating ways in which they affect partnerships and stages of engagement—are vital for supporting effectiveness in CES partnerships.

Figure 2 summarizes the intersects of the concepts and practices of public narrative, reciprocity, and power that bound this study, as well as their theoretical impacts on types of CES partnerships and stages of engagement. Ganz (2009, 2011) proposed that public narrative allows for partners to share identities of Self and develop identities of Us. Theoretically, as stories of Us are narrated, shared values and identities move partners into spaces of equitable power that motivate action to achieve common goals in the Now. As reciprocity, defined by Dostilio, et al. (2012) becomes more generative, enactments of power shift and becomes more equitable and empowering, as theorized by Himmelman (2001). Power manifestations move from control, to collaboration, to creativity, to agency, as described by Rowland (1997).

As reciprocity and power shift, the partnership theoretically moves from transactional to transformational, as described by Enos and Morton (2003) and the stages of engagement progress from pseudo, to stable, to authentic, to sustained, per Hoyt’s theory of stages of engagement (2011). Of course, reality doesn’t precisely reflect theory
or vice-versa; however, the juxtaposition of the these six theories, as shown in Figure 2, points toward practices that support the development of effective CES.

![Figure 2. Intersects of public narrative, reciprocity, power, types of partnerships, and stages of engagement.](image)

**Conclusion**

The research literatures reviewed in this chapter shaped the initiating inquiry and bound the context of this study. Within the frames of CES, public narrative, intersects of power and reciprocity, types of partnerships, and stages of engagement, this study explored and described partnering experiences in a CES collective impact initiative. In the next chapter, I will discuss the design and methodology of this inquiry.
CHAPTER 3
DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe partnering experiences in a CES partnership in the rural South. The study was focused within a project initiated by a land-grant research university partnering with a rural community in the southeastern United States. A narrative inquiry methodology was modified to explore the lived and learning experiences of the community and university partners as they worked together to create and sustain a CES collective impact initiative (Kania & Kramer, 2011) in which multiple public and private entities were involved.

The study was guided by a singular research question: What are the partnering experiences of rural Southern community partners and land-grant research university partners in a collective impact CES partnership? This study fills a gap in the CES literature, which is lacking both in partnering experience narratives and studies that use narrative inquiry methodology. The intention of the study was that all the partners, and the discipline as a whole, might be more fully informed of the relational and partnering dynamics that support a CES partnership that is known to be successful in meeting agreed-upon goals.

Narrative Inquiry

Since partnering is a relational experience (i.e., one that occurs interpersonally), it seemed logical to use a relational methodology to explore the phenomenon. My initial design was based on the method of narrative inquiry proposed by Michael Connelly and
Jean Clandinin (Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These educational investigators developed narrative inquiry with epistemological and ontological commitments to the relationality of qualitative human science research. Their methodology seemed particularly appropriate for guiding a relational inquiry into partnering experiences.

As the first educational researchers to publish on the method of narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) supported their understanding of experience as narrative with John Dewey’s philosophies of knowledge and learning (Dewey, 1938/1997). Based on Dewey’s notions of interaction and continuity, they explain that we narrate our experiences as we experience and relive our narratives. I followed their reasoning: “[T]he answer to the question, Why narrative? is, Because experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Their mantra “narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) has been applied and legitimized throughout narrative research (Kim, 2016), though they continue to emphasize in the literature that their approach is particularly tied to Dewey’s philosophy, which guides their epistemology, ontology, and methodology (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009).

As defined by Clandinin (2013): “Narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 17), which mirrors practices in CES that honor and respect experience as a way of knowing. Narrative inquiry, as proposed by Clandinin, provided a robust, dynamic framework that was particularly appropriate for exploring and understanding multifaceted experiences in partnerships. Inquiring into the three
dimensions of time, relational space, and place allows for describing more fully the complexities, tensions, and tests for successful engagement in CES partnering.

Thus, I chose to follow the methodology of narrative inquiry as discussed. I value the methodology’s clear and intentional philosophical commitments to (a) the exploration of human experience and the nature of being, (b) Dewey’s philosophy regarding learning and knowledge, and (c) relational methods founded on those philosophical commitments. Further, Clandinin & Connelly (2000) extend their three-dimensional methodology to include not only Dewey’s notions of interaction (social, relational space) and continuity (temporality, time), but also to recognize that place (situation or context) is significant in understanding experience. By context, I intend “. . .the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives that shape, and are shaped by, the individual” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 33). The contexts in which this study was situated are described in Chapter 4.

In addition, this study was framed with ontological commitments to subjective experiences of being rather than of doing. Specifically, the inquiry explores the ways in which partners were being together adaptively in sustained engagement, rather than what they were doing together in the technical processes and procedures undertaken to build a partnership. To encapsulate this ontological commitment, the gerund “partnering” is used to explore the participants’ experiences, rather than the common vernacular “building a partnership.” The fundamental question asked of this study’s partnering experiences was: “How were the participants being together in their partnering?” Exploring and describing the lived experiences of partnering as the subject of inquiry was supported by using the frame of public narrative as developed by (Ganz, 2009, 2011).
Conceptual Framework

Ganz’ (2011) construct of public narrative (as discussed in Chapter 2) was used as a theoretical frame for the inquiry process and analytical lens for interpreting the participants’ experiences. Figure 3 provides a graphic description of the conceptual framework informed by Ganz’ concepts. The study explored the partnering experiences of community and campus partners within an inquiry process that was structured by public narratives of Self, Us, Now (Ganz, 2011). The constructs of Self, Us, Now were then applied as analytical lenses to interpret and understand the partnering experiences individually, collectively, and strategically.

Theoretically, employing narrative practices allows space for CES partners to share their past experiences and common values, create conditions in the present to form a reciprocal collective identity, and motivate each other to take action in the future with equitable power to achieve their agreed-up goals. Sharing of public narrative allows for relational spaces in which reciprocity opens possibilities for repositioning power and in which partners are inspired to act.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Narratives of Self</th>
<th>Public Narratives of Us</th>
<th>Public Narratives of Now</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Interpreted Individually</td>
<td>• Interpreted Collectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What brings each partner to the Partnership?</td>
<td>• What shared values and experiences identifies them as a Partnership?</td>
<td>• Interpreted Strategically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What is the work at hand that motivates them to action?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. Conceptual framework of the study.
Study Design

The research context and background stories of Research University Allied Partnership (RAUP), Rural County Allied Partnership (RCAP), and the study participants are described in Chapter 4. In this section, the study design and methods are described. In this retelling of the research process, pseudonyms for people, places, organizations, and entities are used to protect anonymity as promised. I include myself in the telling and retelling at points, recognizing that I cannot remove myself from the story, which is a key component to the method of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2013).

Research Site Selection

The research site was chosen for two reasons: (a) it represented a particular type of partnering—higher education CES—which is built upon mutual benefit and reciprocity (meaning that all partners hold value and respect for the others, as discussed in Chapter 2), and (b) it was proven to be successful in its collective impact endeavors; that is, the partnership has accomplished small and large agreed-up goals and generated new entities for improving the quality of life in the community. As stated in the introductory comment of this chapter, my intention was to describe and explore partnering experiences in a successful partnership to fill a gap in the literature, so that we might be more fully informed of the dynamics that support a successful CES partnership. To accomplish my research goal, I chose an award-winning CES program, Research University Allied Partnership, which recommended a well-established and accomplished community partnership, Rural County Allied Partnership. As mentioned previously, descriptions of these entities and the participants are presented in Chapter 4.
Gateway into the Field

The selection of a research site was a process that built on interviews with the Research University Allied Partnership (RUAP). Another PhD candidate from the same doctoral program included RCAP in her three research sites a few years earlier and RUAP was not sure whether they were ready for another student to be in their midst. At the suggestion of one of my research advisors, I met with the one of the founders of RUAP to ask his thoughts about my research proposal and working with RUAP. He expressed support and suggested that I talk with the RUAP Operations Coordinators. I scheduled a meeting with three of the Operations Coordinators, presented my research proposal, and received positive responses from them. Though I never met with or discussed my research directly with the RUAP Director, one of the Operations Coordinators, Evelyn, presented my proposal to him and received his approval for me to conduct the study.

For my research site, Evelyn suggested that I learn with one of the communities in the previous student’s study in which several participants resided—Rural County Allied Partnership (RCAP)—due to the community’s proven partnering successes, their willingness to share their experiences openly and honestly, and their familiarity with doctoral student research. Evelyn contacted Christy, the Research University Allied Professional who was assigned to work in the community and solicited her support for my research. Though I was not in attendance, Evelyn and Christy presented my research proposal to the Executive Committee of RCAP and received their support.

Despite this smooth entrée, there were limitations involved with the selected site. Evelyn and Christy were cautious about exposing RCAP to yet another research study,
since it would require additional time from community partners; as in all community-engaged work, the university partners tend to protect their relationships, which take time and intention to develop. For this reason, the RUAP partners wanted to ensure that those hard-earned community relationships were not harmed. Moreover, the demanding schedules of the participants and myself often made it difficult for us to connect with each other. Access to the site required annual leave from my job and 10-hour roundtrip drive. Depending on the scheduled times of our meetings, some trips also required overnight lodging. Additionally, this study received no funding support, so a tight budget remained an essential consideration for data collection, analysis, and writing.

**Participant Recruitment and Field Work**

In the sections below, information is provided about the methods undertaken for participant recruitment and involvement in the study. Further, each field-work activity is described, which included a first group inquiry, individual interviews, observations of two RCAP meetings, and a final group inquiry. The field work totaled approximately 14 hours, which generated approximately six pages of handwritten field notes and 240 pages of transcripts.

In addition to the onsite interpersonal engagement, documents and materials provided specific information about RUAP and RCAP processes and procedures—such as meeting agendas, partners and the entities they represented, and lists of projects for RCAP as a whole and for separate Issue Work Groups (IWGs). Newspaper articles and an extensive published history provided information about context. These documents, however, did not provide data regarding the participants’ lived experiences, which were
the focus of the study. Table 1 provides detailed information about the field work activities, texts produced, study participants, and entities they represented.

Table 1

*Field Work Activity, Duration, Pseudonyms, and Entities Represented*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field work activity, participants, location</th>
<th>Duration &amp; texts produced</th>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Entities &amp; orgs represented</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Executive Committee</td>
<td></td>
<td>Christy</td>
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</tr>
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<td>NA/Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27 pages</td>
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<td>Local business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>James</td>
<td>City of Smallville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- 2 pages</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>RUAP (x 2)</td>
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<td>Technical College</td>
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<td>Bonita</td>
<td>Environment &amp;</td>
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<td>RUAP/Allied Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>20 pages</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>45 minutes</td>
<td>Donnie</td>
<td>Local High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallville City Hall</td>
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<tr>
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<td>RUAP/Operations Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
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<td>80 minutes</td>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Local College</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Individual conversation</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
<td>Ginny</td>
<td>Exec Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallville City Hall</td>
<td>17 pages</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chairperson</td>
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*All seven individual interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field work activity, participants, location</th>
<th>Duration &amp; texts produced</th>
<th>Participant Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Entities &amp; orgs represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation of Tourism IWG meeting</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>11 attendees</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Hand-written field notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>Citizen-at-large City</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 pages</td>
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<td>County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>History Museum</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Privately-owned historical site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>RUAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K-12 Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>State Tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Lake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final group inquiry</td>
<td>2.5 hours</td>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>School Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual interview participants</td>
<td>Video &amp; Audio Recorded</td>
<td>Bonita</td>
<td>Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professionally transcribed</td>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>RUAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Donnie</td>
<td>K-12 Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Frances</td>
<td>Local College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ginny</td>
<td>Exec Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>60 pages</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: RUAP – Research University Allied Partnership; IWG – Issue Work Group.

Participants

This study was initially designed to hold individual interviews with the community partners prior to meeting with them as a group so that I could establish a level of rapport with the participants first. The plan was for the individual interviews to establish the study participants, who would have been included in the first group. The first group inquiry participants, however, were six members of the RCAP Executive Committee; three of them also participated in the individual interviews, and three did not. Participants in the first group inquiry were included in the study by virtue of their attendance and willingness to participate in the facilitated discussion during their regularly scheduled Executive Committee meeting. The participants for the individual
interviews were recommended by the Christy, the Allied Professional; all seven responded positively to invitations, and they were also the participants in the final group inquiry (minus one). Of note is that each of the total ten participants, to a person, was supportive of the study and eager to share his/her story; there seemed to be no reluctance among the participants to talk honestly and openly about their experiences in RCAP.

Table 2 provides a list of the participants, their research pseudonym, the entities they represented, and their participation in the study activities.

Table 2

*Participant Number, Pseudonym, Entities Represented, and Participation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Entities Represented</th>
<th>Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>School Board; Education, Industry, Business IWG; Women’s IWG</td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>FINAL Group Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bonita</td>
<td>Tourism IWG; Eco-environmental non-profits</td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FINAL Group Inquiry’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Christy</td>
<td>RUAP</td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>FINAL Group Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First Group Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Donnie</td>
<td>Local School System</td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>First Group Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>RUAP</td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
</tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Frances</td>
<td>Federal Grant Project; Regional Technical College</td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ginny</td>
<td>Nonaligned; Executive Committee Chairperson</td>
<td>Individual Interview</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Helen</td>
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</tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Ivan</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>First Group Inquiry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>James</td>
<td>City of Smallville</td>
<td>First Group Inquiry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: RUAP – Research University Allied Partnership; IWG – Issue Work Group.
First group inquiry. As it happened, Christy scheduled for me to meet with the Executive Committee during their regularly booked monthly meeting before I scheduled with individuals. Because of this, my first contact with site participants was to conduct a facilitated group inquiry with members of the RCAP Executive Committee, whom I had not met until that occasion. To further complicate my original vision, the scheduled day happened to coincide with the day that the local higher education partners were attending a statewide meeting, so several key members involved specifically in community-engaged partnering were not present at that Executive Committee meeting.

As described, my first face-to-face introduction to the RCAP community partners, and them to me, occurred when I facilitated this 1.5-hour group inquiry with six members of the Executive Committee, without the higher education partners and county representatives in attendance. The selection of Executive Committee members as study participants was predicated by their participation on the Executive Committee, which meant that they were knowledgeable of RCAP and involved at a decision-making level with the partnership. Further, because the Executive Committee had approved the research, and Christy had announced my presence and agenda ahead of time, members most likely would not have attended the meeting that day if they had not been willing to voluntarily participate in the study and the facilitated discussion.

In attendance were the Chairperson, who did not represent a partnering entity, and members representing RUAP, local schools, health care, local business and industry, and the City of Smallville. Informed consent and confidentiality were reviewed, and forms were completed before we proceeded with the inquiry, which was video-recorded with each member’s permission.
The inquiry into partnering that I designed, prepared, and facilitated with the Executive Committee members was based on three rounds of exploring experiences of *Self, Us, Now* (Ganz, 2010). *Self, Us, Now* was implemented as a line of inquiry intended to allow participants to reflect on their individual reasons for participation in the local Partnership (Self), their experiences forming a group identity (Us), and their understanding of needed strategic action (Now).

For this first group inquiry, I facilitated the process to elicit narratives about everyone’s experiences with RCAP, walking the group through Self inquiry, then Us inquiry, then Now inquiry. The inquiry ended with a wrap-up round that provided time for the participants to summarize the reflections of their partnering experiences in RCAP that came to light during the inquiry process.

The preparation, facilitation, and participation, along with the creation of the narratives that emerged and the texts that were generated in the inquiry, illustrate my involvement in the process. As discussed previously, Ganz’ (2009, 2010) constructs for public narrative were employed to frame the inquiry, bridge theory with practice, and to provide RCAP leadership with a reflective partnering experience.

This first group inquiry was held in the Smallville Chamber of Commerce conference room. For the first group inquiry agenda, see Appendix A. I video-recorded this inquiry to gain more information from watching the interactions that I would surely have missed while facilitating the group inquiry, and to make it easier for me to distinguish who was speaking on the audio recording, which was professionally transcribed (see Field Work to Field Texts section below).
**Individual interviews.** Christy sent me the names of five RCAP community members who she believed would be interested in participating in the study. Per my request, Christy suggested community partners she knew were involved with and knowledgeable about RCAP in various capacities and were willing to share their experiences. By inviting selected partners, recruitment for the individual interviews was purposeful, meaning the recruitment was designed for “selecting information-rich cases—cases from which one can learn a great deal” (Patton, 2002, p. 242) about the matter being studied.

In this study, the process of purposeful recruitment was intended to target possible participants who were involved and knowledgeable about RCAP so the study would include community members who would embody extensive partnering experiences in higher education CES. All seven of the study participants invited for individual interviews agreed to meet with me—five from the community and two from RUAP, who were Evelyn, the Operations Coordinator, and Christy, the Allied Professional. Christy, Evelyn, and Ginny were ex-officio members of the Executive Committee, Donnie and Frances had attended an Executive Committee meeting to represent their administrators, and Abigail and Bonita had not attended Executive Committee meetings but were very involved in several IWGs. None of the participants in the individual interviews were official members of the Executive Committee, but all were identified as leaders in RCAP.

My recruitment activities for the individual interviews proceeded as follows: I sent an email to the five community partners who Christy recommended, and to Evelyn and Christy, inviting their participation in the study (see Appendix B). When they replied to my invitation, I emailed a brief description of the study and an explanation of informed
consent with an informed consent form (see Appendices C and D, respectively) and scheduled a time to meet with each of them individually.

In light of purposeful targeting of participants, this study did not explore the possibilities of partnering with community members who were not involved in RCAP in some capacity or explore the distinct reasons why they might not be involved. Yet, because I was curious about partnering across subcultures throughout the inquiry, I did wonder why some Rural County populations were not fully represented in RCAP. Extending the boundaries of RCAP to include all the County’s various populations, though mentioned in interviews as a partnering matter, would be a consideration to be explored in future studies.

My next contact with RCAP was to hold the seven individual interviews: five with individual community partners (Abigail, Bonita, Donnie, Frances, and Ginny) and two with university partners (Evelyn and Christy). Before we began our interview about partnering, each participant and I reviewed the intent of informed consent and confidentiality and signed the consent forms.

Because “the aim of the narrative interview is to invite the telling of storied accounts” (Josselson, 2013), the individual interviews were semi-structured, using open-ended, targeted questions to open up the interview and to allow study participants to tell/hear their partnering experiences/stories. I intended for the interviews to be open discussions between the participants and myself (Clandinin, 2013), but the semi-structured interview questions provided for eliciting targeted narratives. Although their partnering experiences were the focus, I also shared my own stories with the participants to set the tone of the interviews as conversational and narrative.
All the individual interviews were held in the conference room at Smallville City Hall, where Christy’s office is located and which she made arrangements for us to use. The exception was the interview with Evelyn, which was held in her office at Research University. All interviews were audio recorded and professionally transcribed. Based on the audio transcriptions of these individual interviews, I created two documents as interim research texts—*narrative profiles* and *summary narratives*—which I will explain in the upcoming sections and which are included in Chapter 4. For individual interview protocols, see Appendix E.

**Meeting observations.** In addition to the first group inquiry and the individual interviews, Christy invited me to observe two meetings: one of the Executive Committee meetings, at which most of the members were present, and one of the Tourism IWG, which was also well attended. Because I did not obtain informed consent from the attendees of the meetings that I observed, I have not used any direct quotes, field texts, or research memos from these meetings, or listed the attendees as study participants. The intent of observing these two meetings was to provide me with exposure to how the Executive Committee and IWGs were organized and how they functioned in RCAP. There were no experiences witnessed or shared during these observations that were included as narratives in the study.

Because my introduction to RCAP was through my attendance at a meeting of the Executive Committee (which I facilitated), the second Executive Committee meeting I attended (which I observed), gave me more context to the broader CES partnering activities. My attendance at the meeting of the IWG allowed me to meet and become acquainted with citizens who were involved in RCAP projects on a limited basis but were
not necessarily fully informed about RCAP as an RUAP Community. In both meetings, several of the study participants with whom I met for individual interviews were also in attendance, so I had an opportunity to observe their partnering participation in different settings. I made brief handwritten notes from these observations, learning about RCAP project agendas and tracking partnering moves in the discussions.

The Executive Committee met in the Chamber of Commerce conference room (where we met for the first group inquiry). The Tourism IWG met in the conference room of the local history museum; this group meets at various tourism locations so that the members are exposed to the various sites in Rural County. While I was at the Rural County History Museum, the Director (who served as a host for the meeting) and his wife (who serves as a volunteer staff person at the museum) were very hospitable and expressed interest in my research. They provided me with several pamphlets and a well-researched history of Rural County, which proved very useful to understand the background and context of RCAP (see Chapter 5 for further information regarding the history of Rural County).

Final group inquiry. As the last step in the inquiry process, I invited all seven of the participants with whom I had individual interviews to meet as a group to review their summary narratives with each other, and to consider how their partnering stories of Self, Us, Now impact the partnership; six of the seven participants joined the 2.5-hour group inquiry (Evelyn was unable to attend). We originally scheduled to meet for two hours but agreed near the end of the time to extend the robust discussion another 30 minutes. Even though Evelyn, the Operations Coordinator who originally supported the study in RUAP, was not able to attend the final group inquiry, I designed and prepared a review of all
seven summary narratives, including Evelyn’s, and facilitated a group inquiry of the meanings the participants drew from each summary narrative.

My design, facilitation, and participation in the discussion demonstrate my participation in the narrative that consequently emerged from the final group inquiry. The retelling of the summary narratives that I had previously crafted were the basis for the facilitated discussion in the final group inquiry. For the final group inquiry agenda, see Appendix F.

The final group inquiry was held in the conference room at the Smallville High School College & Career Academy (CCA) building, which Donnie recommended and arranged. The CCA is a collective impact achievement project led by RCAP, which is now benefiting the community in numerous ways (e.g., placing student interns in businesses, creating student entrepreneurships in the community, and providing access to the conference room at the facility). I also video-recorded this inquiry so that I could gain more information from watching interactions among the participants that I missed while facilitating the discussion, and to make it easier for me to distinguish who was speaking on the audio recording, which was professionally transcribed.

**Closure and Leaving the Field**

At the end of the final group discussion, the participants stated that the narrative inquiry process was “very powerful” for both self- and other-awareness about their partnering. Moreover, they considered together how they might engage members of the RCAP Executive Committee in a similar process to offer an opportunity to strengthen their partnering and impact on the community.
We ended our inquiry together with the participants requesting copies of their narrative profiles, which I assured them would be available after my faculty advisory committee has approved my dissertation. The stories are theirs and they each have a digital copy of their narrative profiles, which were previously emailed to them for validation (as discussed below). My intention had always been to share my research findings and conclusions with the study participants to offer insights for them to strengthen their partnering and community, which addresses the practical and social purposes of my research.

Data Collection

In narrative inquiry, “field texts are co-compositions that are reflective of the experience of researchers and participants, and they need to be understood as such—that is, as telling and showing those aspects of experience that the relationship allows” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 46). As I entered into group inquiries and individual interviews with the participants, I was aware that we were composing the field texts together—the participants with their purposes, questions, and responses to our telling and me with my own purposes, questions, and responses to our telling. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) noted, narrative inquiry moves backward and forward in time, and inward (personally) and outward (socially) in interaction, co-composing itself as it emerges in the relational spaces between researcher and participants.

Because the topic of partnering was the focus of this study (as opposed to how interviews were structurally constructed), professional transcripts were edited for readability, with deletions and additions for clarity (Roulston, 2014, p. 299). Kowal and O’Connell (2014) noted that “all transcription is in principle selective and entails the
inevitable risk of systematic bias of one kind or another” (p. 66). To protect the participants’ anonymity, I did not send video recordings to the transcribers. In addition, to mitigate inevitable mistranslations from audio tapes to transcripts, I read the professional transcripts while listening to the audio, watching the video, or both.

This first round of listening was to identify any errors in the transcribers’ hearing of words or emphases in punctuation. I also listened for transcriptions that were not what I heard in the interview, recognizing that my own hearing is biased as well. My familiarity with Southern accents and idioms assisted me, though, with making quite a few corrections in the transcripts, since my intention was to keep the transcriptions as close as possible to the participants’ words and meanings.

**Data Analysis**

There are many different approaches to narrative analysis, which generally arise from differences in commitments to ontology and epistemology (Caine et al., 2013; Riessman, 2008). Although my field work was decidedly grounded in a relational approach and a narrative view of experience, my analysis and interpretations were conducted without the benefit of further co-creating with the participants. Due to the study limitation discussed previously, I chose to interpret the research texts and retell the participants’ stories by interrogating the field texts that were created in the group inquiries and individual interviews, rather than having the benefit of the participants’ ongoing feedback, participation, and co-creation, as would be ideal in narrative inquiry.

Given the theoretical assumption that experience is narrative, narrative analysis emerges from a constructive mode of thinking that leads to the particular and contextual, and “is a means of showing the significance of lived experience” (Kim, 2016, p. 197). In
a relational narrative analysis, the researcher does not stand outside of the story and inquire into it. Methods that gather data and break them down into codes, categories, patterns, and themes (Kim, 2016, p. 188) and represent stories as objects constitute a very different methodological approach from composing narrative understandings from within lived experiences and composing interim research texts alongside study participants. Relational narrative analysis differs both ontologically and epistemologically from other types of qualitative research. The ontology is different: “being” in narrative analysis is within the stories themselves, not outside of them. The epistemology is different: “knowing” in narrative analysis emerges within relationships with people and texts, and is relational (Hoyt, 2011).

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggested “three concurrent flows of [analysis] activity: (a) data condensation, (b) data display, and (c) conclusion drawing/verification” (p. 12). I completed the analysis of the text in iterative cycles similar to those recommended by these authors, requesting feedback from several peers throughout the process to help me reflect on and become aware of my biases.

**Condensation of Field Texts**

As Roulston (2014) suggests, “For narrative researchers aiming to represent participants’ stories, interviews are edited to represent the central ideas discussed” (p. 304). To condense the field texts, I crafted narrative profiles of the partnering experiences by editing the transcripts from each participant and each inquiry group. Then I further condensed the narrative profiles into a summary narrative, in which each participant’s and each inquiry group’s central partnering experiences were emphasized.
The condensation process started with rereading the transcripts and writing memos—that is, my own thoughts, questions, and musings—regarding the interviews. As I read, I highlighted what I heard of significance about partnering experiences and listened for narrative threads—that is, meanings within the narratives, woven among the participants’ experiences, that were shaping the participants’ partnering.

As Willig (2014) noted, “every interpretation is underpinned by assumptions which the interpreter makes about what is important and what is worth paying attention to” (p. 137). I recognized that the narrative threads I highlighted emerged from within my own narratives, which drove my participation in the interviews and interpretations of meanings in the same way the participants’ narratives drove them. Thus, the narrative profiles were co-created between the participants and myself—their telling/retelling, my listening, reading, interpreting, editing, and retelling—in order to “elaborate and amplify the meaning … contained within the material” (p. 138).

**Narrative Profiles and Summary Narratives**

The narrative profiles were created from my first round of condensing the field texts, and the summary narratives were a further condensation, focusing on the central experiences in the narrative profiles. Roulston (2014) suggested that “theoretical perspectives and research purposes govern what analysts look for in data” (p. 305). Because my inquiry bridged the theory of engagement with the practice of engagement using Marshall Ganz’s (2009) constructs for public narratives, in the first group inquiry, I realized that it might be helpful to organize the narrative profiles also referring to Ganz.

Because three of the final group participants were in the first group inquiry, Ganz’s framework provided continuity in theory and practice both for those participants
and for me from the first group through the narrative profiles to the final group. Introducing a theoretical lens for the participants and me to make meaning of their experiences, while also building a bridge between engagement theory and engagement practice, enhanced our understanding.

**First group inquiry.** The first group inquiry, in which six members of the Executive Committee participated, was facilitated using rounds of discussing Self, Us, Now experiences (Ganz, 2009, 2010). The narrative profile and summary narrative from the first group inquiry were similarly crafted; that is, based on a summary of each round of discussion. In each successive round, the participants shared what interests brought them to RCAP (Self), what experiences they believed were significant to the partnership’s We identity (Us), and how they would describe the partnership currently (Now). The summary narrative for the first group inquiry provided me and with an overview of the Executive Committee members experiences and their individual and collective perspectives about RCAP, both past and present. This first and foundational inquiry and interpretation gave me a sense of the local Partnership and the flow of its partnering over time.

**Individual interviews.** As discussed previously, I condensed the transcripts from the individual interviews to narrative profiles that highlighted narrative threads. Then I rewrote the individual interview narratives applying Ganz’s (2010) constructs of Self, Us, Now to support the participants’ reflection on their RCAP partnering experiences and to provide continuity from the first group inquiry. In a third round of condensation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014), I further reduced the narratives for each participant
crafting a summary narrative that highlighted the central thread running through their experience as I had identified it.

The next step in the process included a validity check of the coherency and authenticity of the narrative profiles. I emailed the narrative profile and the summary narrative drafted for each participant, and requested their feedback and any edits that may be needed to better reflect their story or experiences with validity. All the participants confirmed they felt that my retelling in the narrative profiles and summary narratives were valid representations of their stories. As part of the context for this study, a brief description for each group inquiry and each individual interview appear in Chapter 4.

**Final group inquiry.** By co-creating the narrative profiles and then facilitating a discussion about the summary narratives, six participants and I uncovered a deeper understanding of their partnering experiences. Their sharing of self-reflexive and group-reflective insights about their own actions and those of their partners enhanced understanding about their partnering experiences. In addition, the inquiry process itself offered a new experience of partnering for them.

After the final group inquiry, I retraced the methodological steps with the video and transcript, incorporating the narrative profile and summary narrative for the final group into the next round of narrative analysis, which is discussed in the next section. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this process between field texts and interim texts to research text (final representation) as an inward/outward journey in the relational space, combined with a backward/forward journey in time. Moving within the dimensions of space and time widened my understanding, allowing me to consider the
relationships between stories, to attend to similarities and contrasts, and to find deeper meanings in the experiences than what appears on the surface content of each story.

**Primary Narrative Threads**

After condensing the field texts into summary narratives, in the next round of analysis I considered similarities and patterns in the narratives, grouping them into findings that identified four primary narrative threads, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5: Creating Community, Embracing Diversity, Establishing Boundaries and Expectations, and Sustaining the Partnership. As mentioned previously, these themes were not identified by breaking the narratives into coded data, grouping the codes into categories, and then the categories into themes. Rather, in the process that implemented for this study, the narratives were taken as a whole, with each one telling its own remarkable story regarding partnering experiences. The narratives have similarities that are emphasized by grouping them into threads, or themes, though they could be grouped any number of ways since they overlap and share interconnected dynamics that are not as clear-cut as theory would have us believe.

“The use of theory can be akin to closing the door on the wide openness of an experience and then peering through the keyhole of a particular theoretical lens and pretending this is the whole” (C.A. Downey, personal communication, April 2018). By applying Ganz’ (2009, 2011) constructs regarding public narrative to this study, the view through the proverbial keyhole suggests that CES partners enter into the partnership spurred by their stories of Self and build relationships that create conditions for developing stories of Us, which motivate them into determining and taking strategic
actions in the Now. The realities of partnering experiences are so much more complex and complicated, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6.

In a last step of analysis, I discussed my findings with peers and with the RUAP partners who participated in the study. These discussions helped me to reflect upon the connections, overlaps, interactions, and meanings between the narrative threads, which both form and inform partnering experiences within RCAP. Table 3 lists the steps taken in the entire methodological research process, including the focus and analytical approach in each step.

Table 3

*Methodological Steps, Focus, and Analytical Approach*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodological steps</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Analytical approach</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading, rereading, listening, re-listening to tapes and transcripts</td>
<td>Listening for meanings in participants’ stories</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing, rewriting Narrative Profiles</td>
<td>Reducing field texts to represent central partnering experiences</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Narrative Profiles in Self/Us/Now frame</td>
<td>Applying theory to frame experiences for further understanding</td>
<td>Analysis of narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing, rewriting summaries of the narrative profiles – summary narratives</td>
<td>Reducing field texts to represent central partnering experiences</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring individual Narrative Profiles and summary narratives represented participants authentically</td>
<td>Verifying co-creation and authenticity of condensation of field texts</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking for patterns and similarities in summary narratives</td>
<td>Understanding experiences of partnering</td>
<td>Analysis of narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorizing partnering experiences (narrative threads)</td>
<td>Understanding experiences of partnering</td>
<td>Analysis of narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retelling stories of partnering experiences in each narrative thread</td>
<td>Representing partnering experiences</td>
<td>Narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying connections and interactions between narrative threads</td>
<td>Understanding experiences of partnering</td>
<td>Analysis of narratives</td>
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**Ethics in Narrative Research and Trustworthiness of the Study**

Because the entire enterprise of narrative research is based on relationships between the researcher and the participants, and entails the co-creating, telling, and retelling of the participants’ experiences, ethical considerations are foremost for the researcher—from accessing the field to representing the study (Clandinin, 2013). The stories shared belong to the participants and must be presented with a primary concern for the participants’ meanings and intentions. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, “Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process” (p. 170). How the researcher’s own narratives impact the on-going narrative of the participants is a crucial consideration. How the researcher represents the narratives of individuals and the research site is important for future narratives of the project. The researcher must consider impacts on all stakeholders on all three dimensions of the study—time, place, and relational space, including the integrity and authenticity of the study itself.

In the *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry*, Josselson (2007, p. 538) points out that researchers are intruding into the lives of people we then label and refer to as the participants in our study, asking them to teach us something about which we want to learn, and we are thus accountable to those people in the context of our human relationship with them. She recommends an ethical attitude to guide one’s ethical decision-making.

At several junctures during field work, I checked in with the participants to ensure that they were aware of the voluntary nature of their participation. I let them know that I would use pseudonyms to conceal their names, but that I could not guarantee that others
familiar with RCAP would not be able to identify them. I wanted them to be aware of the possibility of their stories being recognized when published in my dissertation.

More than once, I asked if they were comfortable with my sharing the narrative profiles. I wanted them to feel safe that, in handing me a piece of their life experience, I would use their information only as they had agreed for it to be used. One of the study participants verified at the end of the final group inquiry that the inquiry process felt safe to her: “I felt safe about sharing my story and I think that’s a very, very important piece too.”

As I have written my findings and conclusions about partnering, I have held in mind how my considerations might impact the participants, RCAP, and RUAP. I am aware that I am biased toward doing no harm. Further, while being true to what I have learned, I am aware that my conclusions are blinded by my own narrow perspectives and understandings of the participants’ experiences.

Social, Personal, and Practical Justifications

Clandinin (2013) discussed justifications for research as a part of ethical considerations, asking these questions of ourselves as researchers for social, personal, and practical justifications: “Who cares? and So what?” (p. 35). Throughout this study, the “Who cares?” question centered around the fact that I held social responsibilities to RUAP and RCAP and that members of these partnerships care about the outcomes of the study. Ethical consideration during this study included the impact of revealing RCAP partners’ stories to each other and to RUAP, the originating and resource base of the local Partnership. While, as a researcher, I committed to presenting the participants’ stories as they were revealed to me, I was cautious not to intervene in RCAP in ways that might
disrupt the carefully tended relationships that had been built between them and Research University, and among themselves (e.g., city and county representatives, school and city representatives, chamber of commerce and school).

I did not want the telling of their stories to generate uncertainties about each other’s integrity or participation. I was careful to interpret each story through a lens that displayed how their stories made a positive contribution to the whole, including tensions between relational landscapes and “bumping against” each other in their partnering experiences.

As a PhD candidate, I represented RUAP to the community; had I not been attached to Research University, I would not have been in the RCAP community. Through my facilitations, interpretations, and writing, I sought to remain impartial regarding any partnering experiences—as any representatives of Research University must remain to sustain the trust of the community. In addition, I chose to maintain neutrality in both practice and research to sustain the confidence of the gatekeepers who had entrusted me with access to RCAP.

The “So what?” deliberation for my research takes into consideration RUAP, RCAP, and the discipline of higher education engaged scholarship. The practical purposes of this study were to inform RUAP about how they might better support future developing partnerships, and to reflectively inform RCAP about their own development. The academic purpose of my study was to fill a gap in the CES literature. I have a responsibility to my colleagues in engaged scholarship to offer research that contributes to our ongoing conversations about sound theory and best practice, always looking to bridge the two in praxis.
Rigor of the Inquiry

This study was not designed to answer theoretical questions; it was intended to tell authentic stories of how people experienced partnering with one another in RCAP. The research site was chosen because it represented CES, and was built upon mutual benefit and reciprocity and had proven to be successful in its collective impact endeavors. The intention of the study was to tell the partnering stories of a successful partnership and understand the ways in which partnering experiences contributed to or impacted an established partnership.

The rigor of the study should thus be measured against the openness of the telling, the veracity of the retelling, and the rigor of the analysis. Was the methodology appropriate? Was the analysis “systematic and thorough” (Barbour, 2014, p. 499)? Was the representation informative and compelling? As Kim points out, “the narrative mode establishes verisimilitude by creating good stories that are lifelike” (Kim, 2016, p. 10), and I would add, that reflect authentically the narratives of those who lived the experiences.

Limitations of the Study

As my study progressed from field work with the study participants (i.e., inquiry groups, interviews, observations) to field texts (i.e., transcriptions, field notes, documents) to interim research texts (i.e., narrative profiles and summary narratives), I began to realize the limitations of my design (i.e., time, distance, and funding).

Because I could not spend the time with the participants that was required for a full relational co-composed analysis, these design limitations precluded me from implementing Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) methodology with complete fidelity. To
build the depth of relationships with study participants needed to create a relational co-inquiry, I would have needed not only more time, but also longer spans of time. More time could have yielded an opportunity to “come alongside” the university and community partners in the study site and continue to co-create the study with them from field work through to the final research text. I did, however, use the narrative profiles and summary narratives as a tool for continuing to relate with the participants indirectly through further exploration of those texts.

A narrative inquiry accounts for the lived experiences of the study participants, including those of the researcher, which means the study is totally immersed in subjectivity and intersubjectivity. While some might consider subjectivity to limit a study, narrative inquiry assumes subjectivity opens the study up to limitless possibilities for learning (Clandinin, 2013).

As I met with the study participants, engaged in interviews with them, and facilitated group inquiries, I was aware of my own narratives influencing my decisions and interactions. I was aware that I could not step outside of myself and take an objective stance, and that I needed to be as clear as possible about my biases and beliefs impacting my participation in the study. As I began to write and rewrite to understand what I learned with the participants, I leaned on peers to assist me with recognizing my blinders and biases, owning them, and being truthful about them in my writing. Using narrative inquiry as a guiding methodology for this study means that I bring my own experiences and meanings to the brief relationships I shared with the participants. In the next section, I disclose the narrative that brought me to this inquiry.
**Subjectivity Statement**

Clandinin (2013) spoke of “coming alongside” the study participants with our own narratives as they are living out their own stories in their retelling with us, and we compose the inquiry together. To explain my interest in engaged-scholarship research, I share my own context and background in the section to follow.

**Being Engaged Scholarship – A Story**

My stories about engaged scholarship and partnering began my senior year in high school, although I did not realize it until several years into my doctoral studies. As I looked backward and forward, inward and outward, through my own personal narrative over time, I suddenly realized that I have been immersed in engaged scholarship since my adolescence. Engaged scholarship was not something I knew that I did or anything I actively sought out; it was how I grew up, and, therefore, it is who I am.

**The community.** I come from a small Southern cotton farming community with a mill and a train track. Through the 1800s, the young men who attended the new university nearby, The University of North Carolina (UNC), would ride the train to Venable – (now Carrboro) and take a coach to the college. A town grew up around the University to serve its needs, and now that town, Chapel Hill, adjoins Carrboro. A church sits at the line between the two towns, and you would not know when you left one and entered the other, if you did not know where the town limits are.

Carrboro people know where the town limits are.

My great-grandmother, my grandmother, my mother, and I—all believers in the power of education—felt a definite *town-gown* divide between Carrboro and Chapel Hill. (Town refers to those who were local; gown refers to those associated with the university.
By the time my mother was in high school in the 1940s, the Chapel Hill (UNC-affiliated) kids went to high school with the Carrboro kids, and the socio-economic and cultural disparities were tangible. When I was in high school and some Carrboro kids had to take off school days to pick cotton in the fall, the Chapel Hill kids would complain and want a day off. As far as I know, no one ever took them up on joining the Carrboro kids to pick cotton. Maybe if they had, there would have been more understanding between the two cultures.

By the time I reached high school in the 1970s, a wide divide existed between the children of those who came to Chapel Hill because of the University versus those of us whose families had been farmers and local business people in the area for generations. Local people felt a loyalty to the University because it provided jobs, and they tolerated UNC students because they brought their parents’ money to town. Chapel Hill High School in the 1970s had no Pep Club, no PTA to speak of, no school traditions, no school loyalty—all identity, energy, and focus were directed towards UNC. The local school had become subordinate to UNC.

My extended family (I can name 50 or more aunts, uncles, and cousins off the top of my head) was a mixed bag when it came to feelings about UNC. Part of the land grant for the University included my mother’s paternal great-grandfather’s farm. The Hogan Farm is still where the UNC mascot, Rameses, is boarded and cared for to this day. We were all “Tar Heels” to the core. Yet, only a few of us—outside of my parents, a couple of my siblings and cousins, and I—went to college. Education, in my extended family, came primarily by the work of your hands and the sweat of your brow.
While my father, several cousins, and the women in my mother’s family, all believed in the power of education, “The College of Hard Knocks” was the institution that most of my extended family attended, with those few exceptions mentioned above. The learning was the kind that runs deep in a Protestant work-ethic through generations of farming, from the potato fields of Ireland, to the cotton fields of North Carolina, to entrepreneurship and business management. This learning emerged through grinding out an existence from deep within the soil of the earth, and the work of your “hands and heart,” with not so much reliance on formal education that centered on “head” knowledge.

Since my teenage years, I have felt that I am living on a bridge that extends between the wisdom of my salt-of-the-earth family and the wisdom of knowledge-driven higher education. Sometimes this bridge collapses and I end up in the river. And sometimes the river seems like the safer place, because I float along in my own preoccupations without being pulled by the tensions between town and gown. The town is the one in which I grew up, with people who are my flesh and blood, and whose love, caring, and wisdom have sustained me throughout my entire life—and literally, at times, saved my life. The gown (the university) is the one that allowed my parents, and then me, to grow beyond our childhoods, dream big, and expand our worlds—which proved salvific as well.

As anyone with several decades of living has experienced, it often feels safer to stay with what we know. If we, in Carrboro, opened ourselves up to these people at the University who were from all over the world—practicing many different religions or none at all, eating odd foods, listening to strange music, and speaking multiple languages
that were all foreign to us—maybe they would influence us in ways that we might not want to be influenced, or that we might not want our children to be influenced. And maybe if the folks at the University sat in my great-aunt’s kitchen in Carrboro and learned about the life of a farm girl—whose father died when she was little, and whose mother fed, clothed, and raised her and her sister on their farm by the labor of her hands—they might find out that not all learning in the United States comes from formal education. They might risk discovering that their investment of time and money in higher education will not serve them as well in life as toiling with the earth or learning a trade does. Even in an age when we are no longer farmers, my extended family is still composed mostly of working-class people who are generally suspicious of people with higher education. Although with each generation this belief is changing, such was the context of my personal formation.

**The campus.** Meanwhile, over at UNC in the late 1960s, a child psychiatrist, Eric Schopler, and a child psychologist, Robert Reichler, obtained a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health to create a program with the parents of children with autism, the Child Research Project. Eric and Bob (who required me to call them by their first names) did not believe that so-called “refrigerator mothers” caused autism, per the prevailing psychoanalytic theory of the cause of autism (Mesibov, Shea, & Schopler, 2005). On the contrary, they believed these parents could be taught how to provide therapy for their children (Schopler & Reichler, 1972), so that the families remained intact rather than institutionalizing their children, which was the fate of most children with autism at that time.
Through a joint effort between the UNC Department of Psychiatry and the NC Society for Autistic Children (now the Autism Society of North Carolina, ASNC), the Child Research Project was funded by the state and was named Division TEACCH (Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communications Handicapped Children; http://teacch.com/). The program was a higher education community-engaged scholarship effort long before the scholarship of engagement was named two decades later by Ernest Boyer (see Chapter 2). Division TEACCH grew and the research began to take shape as data were gathered with the parents, children, and therapists. In 1972, the founders were approached by the vocational education teacher at Chapel Hill High School, Mr. Moser, my first job outside of church and family was created, and I became acquainted with engaged scholarship. Though I did not know it then, Division TEACCH was created as engaged scholarship in the beginning. TEACCH was generated from the partnership forged between Eric, Bob, the therapists and staff representing UNC, and the parents of children and ASNC representing the community. As Mesibov et al. (2005) stated: “From the very beginning, our parents had had (sic) a primary role in helping us decide the direction of our service and intervention research” (p. 10). They were describing an engaged-scholarship program.

Eric and Bob, and the program therapists and staff, created a mutually beneficial, generatively reciprocal partnership with the parents of the children whom they sought to help. In their quest for how best to treat children with autism, they treated the parents as equals, and they shared with the parents the same level of power and authority that they held as faculty in the UNC School of Medicine. Through this collaboration, the parents
were not only involved, but also fully invested in the development of both the program and the research.

From the generative reciprocity that the parents built with Eric and Bob, a new entity emerged—Division TEACCH. Now known as TEACCH, the program remains a UNC program, led by University decision-makers, and serves families in the State of North Carolina and internationally who are struggling to learn how best to educate their child who has been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder. From the reciprocal collaboration of the faculty in a university research project and the citizens who formed a community nonprofit to benefit their children, a statewide, internationally known, and sustained program was generated.

The parents who came to the Division TEACCH project in the 1960’s had to risk changing how they understood and raised their child; and they had to risk changing how they perceived and engaged with doctors and professors. Doctors, professors, medical residents and students who worked in the project had to risk changing how they understood and engaged with the parents and children. The reciprocal relationships that were forged between those who represented the university and those who represented the community were the linchpin of the program. I stood in the center—belonging to the community yet belonging to the university as well.

**The engaged scholar.** My life in engaged scholarship began when I was a teenager. Throughout my college years, I continued to work with TEACCH in the summer. Two parents, a TEACCH therapist, and I started the first (that we knew of) residential camp program for children with autism, which grew and still exists today.
One summer, we started a day-camp program for children with autism in partnership with the Chapel Hill Recreation Department.

During my freshman year in college, TEACCH hosted an international colloquium at UNC; the keynote speaker was the German psychiatrist who named the syndrome of infantile autism, Leo Kanner. At the colloquium, I attended workshops with physicians and faculty from all over the world, in which Eric, Bob, and TEACCH parents presented their research side by side; the research for which I had completed the data coding when I was in high school.

As I went on to college and graduate school, I was intimately aware of places and spaces in which the universities I attended intersected with the communities surrounding them—through service-learning, through courses my professors taught in tandem with local citizens, through personal relationships with campus staff, through internships, and through grant-funded programs serving the community. Because I also cherish my Southern Appalachian heritage in my father’s family, at times I will off-handedly refer to myself as a hillbilly. A professor once asked me disparagingly if I was a hillbilly or a scholar. My response was, “Yes.” I am both. I am town and I am gown. I tell and retell, live and relive both narratives.

Engaged scholarship is not something I do, it is who I am. I suspect, for those who take up the tumultuous, risky, and transformative work of engaged scholarship—both from within higher education and from within the community—the work is truly who they are as well. Most do not know, or honestly care, what the discipline is called inside academia; this is just who they are and how they function. They are busy simply being engaged scholarship—working with local college administrators, faculty, and
students to teach, learn, and serve together. And on campus, we are still learning how best to engage with people in their communities in order to address our mutual concerns.

I was in the second year of my doctoral program when I first heard the term engaged scholarship, and I recognized what it meant immediately. I knew then that I wanted to contribute to the research and practice of the discipline. Partnering—which I had witnessed the TEACCH parents and UNC faculty struggle to co-create and which I had also experienced with both the parents and the faculty—was the core of the process for me.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I reviewed the process I engaged to complete field work, co-compose field texts with the participants, condense those texts into narrative profiles and summary narratives, explore the summary narratives further with the study participants in a final group inquiry, and incorporate the narrative profile from the final inquiry into a thematic analysis of the narratives. Throughout all these research activities, interpretation was occurring (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) as I considered what I was learning in an iterative process backward and forward in time, and inward and outward in relating (Clandinin, 2013).

Further analysis was taken up after leaving the field to incorporate the final group inquiry narrative profile into the whole narrative about partnering experiences in RCAP. In Chapter 5, I will reveal and discuss the findings from the participants’ partnering experiences. A closing chapter will draw conclusions and make recommendations for future research based on this study. While generalizations should be made cautiously from the subjective focus of this study, we can learn from the experiences of these study
participants ways to be within CES that might prove to be increasingly effective for developing partnerships in the future. First, however, Chapter 4 provides descriptions of the study context and participants.
CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE STUDY CONTEXT AND PARTICIPANTS

Rural County Allied Partnership (RCAP) was created by the alliance of Research University Allied Partnership (RUAP) and the citizens of Rural County, located deep in the southeastern United States. Because the larger concept of the Allied Partnership originated at Research University, this contextual narrative begins with the university program, RUAP, continues with the story of Rural County (the place of this study), then includes the story of the local community program, RCAP. With the broader context established, I will then share the narrative profiles that were condensed from seven individual interviews and two group inquiries with study participants will be offered.

The stories of the partnerships and participants convey elements of the times, spaces, and places in which this inquiry was composed, and through which the living, telling, reliving, and retelling of partnering experiences in RCAP occurred. I further recognize that I have come alongside RCAP and the study participants amid their collective and individual experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2013); their lives and stories were moving before I entered them and are moving on even as I write about them. While these histories are moments in time, they are being re-written even as I am writing them now.

Research University Allied Partnership (RUAP)

RUAP, a nationally award-winning engaged scholarship program (Garber, Epps, Bishop, & Chapman, 2010) was the original concept of a public service faculty member
and the vice-president of public service at Research University, bolstered by a review of outreach services at the University. These educators sought to create a program in Research University’s public service unit that could partner with communities in engagement scholarship for teaching and research, as well as serve as a portal for communities to access university resources to support community development and outreach. As defined by transformational engaged partnerships (see Chapter 2), RUAP joins with communities to implement social change. Garber and Adams (2017) described the Allied Partnership program as follows:

[Allied] brings together stakeholders from across various sectors, such as business, local government, education, nonprofit organizations, and public health, and creates opportunities for community members to partner together in conjunction with assistance from [Research University] (and other entities such as other higher education organizations) in order to create sustainable change for complex social issues and economic development. (p. 10)

The key elements of engaged scholarship, i.e., mutual benefit, reciprocity, and scholarship (Sandmann, 2008), were built into the design of the program. Another essential element incorporated into the program was “performing a neutral facilitator role” (Garber & Adams, 2017, p. 9) within the community partnering process. Also significant are the roles of a collective impact backbone organization . . . dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations who can plan, manage, and support the initiative through ongoing facilitation . . . handling the myriad logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative to function smoothly. (Kania & Kramer, 2011, p. 40)
The three primary staff positions created in the RUAP were those of Director, Operations Coordinator, and Allied Professional. Garber and Adams (2017) reported that the Director leads the staff and works with communities to develop new partnerships, while the Operations Coordinator builds partnerships inside the University and with other higher education institutions “to facilitate access to higher education and other resources for the director and communities” (p. 11). The Allied Professional, embedded in the community, serves to facilitate meeting logistics and agendas, enable development of community partnering, and coordinate student and faculty involvement in the community. Most significantly,

the [Allied] professional was not represented as a content expert, but rather as a skilled organizational facilitator . . . to perform the critical role of neutral third-party facilitator in the community, and to focus on mobilizing resources [within and outside of the community] to address community-identified needs and issues. (p. 11)

Garber and Adams (2017) made the case that the various roles fulfilled by the Allied Partnership matched the roles of a backbone organization in collective impact programs, as identified by Kania and Kramer (2011).

Per the Operations Coordinator (Pseudonym, personal communication, September 8, 2017), the intention of the Allied Partnership is for a community to eventually learn the skills essential to provide for its own leadership, partnering, and backbone organizational roles. When the community is empowered to support its own partnering in democratic discourse and consensus building (Himmelman, 2001), the Allied Partnership “graduates” the community, meaning that partnering with RUAP shifts and the
community is considered an Alumni Community. The community will have continued connections to the Allied Partnership and University resources, while providing leadership and modeling for communities that are actively developing as Allied Partnership Communities. At this point in a RUAP partnership, the community has established its own agency and equitable power relations, and invites other entities, including higher education institutions, to partner with it to reach the community’s goal for itself (Himmelman, 2001).

**Rural County, Southeastern USA**

One of the leading families in Rural County commissioned the research and writing of a history of the county. In order to protect anonymity, I am unable to cite the publication and author. However, I need to acknowledge that much of what I learned about the place of my research site was from an extensive and detailed demographic and cultural accounting of the origins of the county, shared with me by the Director of the Rural County History Museum. I know more about the history of Rural County due to the wide-ranging and robust history skillfully written by an historian. Recognizing that all history is written from a perspective, I wondered about some aspects of the county’s history that were not discussed in the history book or during the inquiry and I mention those musings here and in Chapter 6.

The area of land that became Rural County had been settled and tamed by Anglo men (and their families in many cases), where indigenous people (now labeled Native Americans), the British, the French, and the Spanish had all once been located. The streak of independence that was apparent in the first settlers is evident in the people of Rural County today. Some for better and some for worse, it seemed to me that Rural
County (like most of the South) still holds vestiges of the culture when the county was first established on February 14, 1907. The narratives of Rural County inhabitants have been lived, told, relived, retold, and reinterpreted many times through the span of a century plus.

The American Civil War, which devastated the land and its people, had been lost 42 years before Rural County was established, yet its impact was still being felt. Slavery had been abolished, Reconstruction was over, militias had been removed, and Jim Crow laws were well established by 1907. Demographically, many people in the area were freed slaves. White farmers were still uncertain about how to manage a paid-labor workforce that out-numbered them, yet those farmers/businessmen were beginning to prosper once again. Forty years after the War Between the States (as some in the South still refer to the American Civil War), farms were recovering to support both families and the local economy. Railroads, roads, and schools had to be built, freedmen had to feed their families, and white men were determined to ensure they remained in control of the territory after the militia had finally withdrawn. (Note that there is little said about the leadership of women at that time in history.)

What some in the South refer to as a “plantation mentality” has both treasured characteristics that have been romanticized and distained characteristics that have been demonized. Nevertheless, the tragic realities of Black Codes before Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws after Reconstruction cannot be underestimated for their social, economic, educational, and cultural impacts. As white landowners lost their “property”—that is, enslaved human beings—they determined to keep freed slaves from gaining any possibility of accessing capacities for decision-making in society. The remnants of Jim
Crow, while no longer the law, are still apparent in the Deep South today. People of color experience barriers to decision-making and joining in community through sometimes imperceptible and sometimes blatant, but assuredly powerful customs that have been long established and excused for generations as “the way things are.”

It took 30 years of advocacy for the farmers/businessmen (most businesses were owned by farmers) who were in favor of establishing a new county—and not all in the area were in favor—to convince the state legislature to establish Rural County by combining equal portions of the counties to the east and west. The primary rationale for a new county detailed in the petition to the Legislature (although other rationales surely existed) was that the terrain was too challenging to allow access by horse and carriage to Nexton, the county seat where business and agricultural markets were located. Because voting landowners could not access the county seat in inclement weather, they could not participate in governance, and were therefore being taxed without representation. Eventually, political alliances in the legislature shifted and the rationale for the new county won the debate.

The county to the east, Next County, which lost a portion of its area and people to Rural County, has flourished through the decades, largely in part due to large plantations, more resources remaining after the Civil War, and the fact that it had been established decades earlier. The two county seats, Smallville in Rural County, and Nexton in Next County are still rivals in economic resources, public and social services, Southern social standing, historical standing, and even high school football; their history of tension is reflected in present-day conversations.
The families of the early leaders in Rural County made significant contributions to the county, launching businesses and growing the economy. Two of the county’s leading families established agricultural businesses that flourished; primarily these two businesses and families provided employment and patronage to Rural County and its people, bestowing public funding support and leadership for nearly a century. Their names are inscribed on buildings and roads across the county in memorial to their dedication and service to the community.

At the end of the 20th century, as the nation’s economy faltered, so did Rural County’s premiere businesses, and so did Rural County—as did many agricultural and industry-based economies across the nation. Since the companies and the families that built them were tied to Rural County’s history and identity, when one of the plants closed and the other one was sold, jobs went away, patronage ended, and the county floundered, not only economically, but also in its identity. This is the point in its history when RUAP entered Rural County.

**Rural County Allied Partnership (RCAP)**

RCAP was formed in 2012 when a RUAP Operations Coordinator suggested to one of the citizens that the county might want to apply to become an Allied Partnership Community. The county leaders did their research, made connections, submitted their application, and were accepted by RUAP to form an Allied Partnership Community Partnership (see RUAP section in this chapter).

The original plan with RUAP and the community was a six-month commitment, which lessened the initial financial burden on the government, education, business, and industry partners who initially joined the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). By
the time the six months had passed, the members of the local Partnership had already seen the huge benefit for their community to have the University’s resources available to them, and they all anted up again for another year, with some additional partners joining.

At start-up, RUAP facilitated a large community listening session in which nearly a hundred citizens discussed their concerns, issues, and priorities, and came to a consensus about what they wanted to address first. An Executive Committee was formed by representatives from each of the member entities, that is, those who had signed the MOU and invested funds in the process, and the Executive Committee members agreed to lead Issue Work Groups (IWGs) focused on the agreed-upon priorities. One IWG was formed with the county’s four main governing entities: County, Cities of Smallville and Hartstown, and the County School Board, with a priority for building collaboration among them.

Once RCAP had outlined their priorities, the Allied Professional facilitated the forming of IWGs by inviting anyone in the community who might touch the issue in any way to meet, discuss concerns, voice opinions, offer suggestions, and create an action plan. The intention was to have as many perspectives and resources at the table as possible, which set the model of civic engagement advocated by RUAP to be inclusive representation and consensus. The IWGs are where the on-the-ground work of an Allied Partnership is accomplished.

Early successes fueled larger, more complex endeavors, and three local and regional higher education institutions became partners in a large, multi-year, education-business-industry workforce development project. Other major projects include addressing teenage pregnancy, building local tourism and eco-system protection,
championing the county’s history and heritage, and addressing their rural populations’ healthcare concerns.

There are several programs in the County that were generated by the work of IWGs that now have their own leadership committees, set their own agendas, and meet without the facilitation of the Allied Professional, which is the ideal. The intention of the RUAP is for the community to learn the skills of deliberative democratic discourse and consensus-building that will allow them to engage all the perspectives and resources available to them, both within and outside of the County to address their community’s needs and concerns.

To establish full collective empowerment (Himmelman, 2001), traditional barriers must be broken down so that everyone feels welcomed to participate and vested to share in the “capacity to produce intended results” (p. 278). RCAP does not yet have all populations in the county represented in the decision-making process, and they are still unsure how to address apparent barriers, but the stated intention of the study participants was to do so. At the time of this narrative inquiry study, six years after RCAP formed, RCAP leaders are currently unsure about graduating into an Alumnus status, which requires organizing RCAP without RUAP and the Allied Professional to provide direct guidance (see RUAP section in this chapter).

**Participant and Group Inquiry Portraits**

The stories and interviews shared with me by the study participants are the subjects of this narrative inquiry study, and thus are the foundational contexts and texts in which the inquiry was conducted. These stories are the spaces, although limited in time, in which the participants and I interacted and considered together the meanings of their
experiences of partnering. Because the study is relational, I have included my participation in our discussions in the inquiry stories. From our interviews and group inquiries, I crafted narrative profiles and a summary of each narrative to frame our inquiry space. Below are brief descriptions crafted from the narrative profiles; the full narrative profiles from the individual interviews are included in Appendix G.

The first description recounted is from the first group inquiry I facilitated, which was my first meeting and introduction to RCAP partners. Next are seven narratives condensed from the interviews I had with seven study participants, three of whom were in the first group inquiry, and four of whom I met for the first time for our interview. The final narrative in this section was generated from the final group inquiry, which included six of the seven individual study participants.

**First Group Inquiry**

In an introductory meeting, six of the Executive Committee members agreed to participate with me in a facilitated discussion in which we described our experiences of Self, Us, Now (see Chapter 3) in the RCAP. I participated in the process, underscoring that my story/experience is present inside the inquiry alongside theirs (Clandinin, 2013). Three of those present also joined me in an individual interview at a later scheduled time and participated in the final group inquiry.

The Executive Committee’s sharing revealed that their initial Self motives for entering the Partnership varied from personal interest in community leadership, to RCAP IWG priorities, to work assignment as a representative of their employer. Most of them endured some “turbulent weather” in their experiences of Us. A few of their representative entities experienced changes that impacted their participation.
Helen, for instance, shared that she was not able to participate while she was filling two roles in her healthcare employment. Now that work positions had been filled, she was able to attend the Executive Committee and contribute to the development of RCAP healthcare priorities. Ivan talked about recent ups and downs in the Chamber of Commerce and that he had only recently joined the RCAP in representation of the Chamber. He stated that he perceives the county to be much like the Chamber, as a “91-year old start-up.” While the county and Chamber have long histories, they both continue in flux after economic downturns and challenges at the turn of their century of existence.

In the final round of the inquiry, the Executive Committee members each described their Now experiences of partnering as a joining together of their separate entities in a synergistic relationship that has strengthened their separate entities as well as the local Partnership, yet they do not have a clear vision of the future of RCAP. Ivan described his understanding of RCAP’s Now: “We have lots of really, really great leaders in the community; but I don’t know that we have a central vision. I don’t know that there is a structure that’s successfully uniting all of those disparate leaders.” Even though RCAP has provided a forum for practicing deliberative civic engagement and consensus leadership over the past six years, the community partners do not seem to envision the opportunity continuing into the future.

**Study Participant Portraits**

Seven RCAP partners (see Chapter 3) agreed to a research interview with me, which was semi-structured in order to allow space for a dialogue to emerge between us. I crafted a summary narrative from each of those interviews to convey the experiences of partnering expressed by each participant. As mentioned previously, the summary
narratives were used as the focus of the facilitated discussion in the final group inquiry. Below I include a bit more information from our interviews to describe the impetus of each narrative.

**Abigail.** Abigail’s narrative is based in an experience of belonging that develops by intending to belong, by respecting the community and its people, by making oneself available to the community, and by acting on the community’s behalf—whether one grew up here or not.

Abigail moved to Smallville over 25 years ago with her husband and children. Her husband is a well-known professional in the community, but she feels like they “belong” to Smallville, and Smallville “belongs” to them: “We became part of the community. Even though we are not native, people treat us like we’re native.” Abigail and her family respect the local people and have made themselves part of them. It is as if she does not know that she is “not from these parts.” Smallville is her town and Rural is her County: “It’s my heart.”

Interestingly, not being a native from this small, Southern town meant that Abigail did not have the “insider/outsider” narrative with which most folks from small towns identify. This was not the case with Frances (see below), who is sensitive to what it means to be an “outsider” in the county. (I am from a small Southern town with family who located there before the Civil War. I identify deeply with an “insider/outsider” narrative, and this feature of Abigail’s partnering was significant to me as a researcher, given the RCAP’s small-town, Southern history context.)
**Bonita.** Bonita’s narrative is based in partnering from the center as a concerned native of the County, and from the margin when her values and concerns are in tension with those who are decision-makers in the county.

Bonita was born and raised in Smallville. Her history as a native of the county is an important part of her personal narrative. She has lifetime relationships with others in the community who are involved with RCAP: “I know him. We grew up together.” She has been involved in the community in a variety of leadership positions, but her central focus in the RCAP is on environmental concerns and projects that preserve the unique history and landscape of the county. Because it is her personal interest, she possesses extensive knowledge about the county’s environment and history about which others are not familiar. She brings perspective and knowledge that are unique. Her involvement in RCAP has been challenged by others who have decision-making power in the community, but she has been able to find alternate paths and motivation to action. She is now working in a sustained project that was generated from her leadership in RCAP.

**Christy.** Christy’s narrative builds on her partnering experiences with a previous community and, notably, on understanding the significance of her role as convener and coach when she joined RCAP as the Allied Professional, and particularly now as RCAP considers sustainability.

Christy is the second Allied Professional to partner with RCAP. She joined RCAP when it “was a little more mature’ [that is], most of the stakeholders had already developed some good skills in working with each other.” She has built relationships from her perspective as a community developer. She joined RCAP with reciprocity, that is, having respect for and valuing of the community’s knowledge, and is now considering
how to be supportive of RCAP as they move into an independent future, without her presence as a convener and coach.

As RCAP asks and answers the question “How will we, as a community, sustain enterprises and partnerships that exist currently, and create needed initiatives in the future?”, Christy will have worked herself out of partnering within the Partnership. Others from the community will then fulfill the roles of convener(s) and coach(es) for the community, picking up the backbone organization roles that she has been providing for them.

**Donnie.** Donnie’s narrative emerges through believing that his interest, concern, caring, and unique skills, and that removing barriers for others to make connections, can make an impact in his community.

Donnie grew up in Rural County and played high school football in the team’s undefeated season, losing their only game to FarSouth in the State Playoff game. He says that the experience of a crushing defeat as a teenager allowed him to learn later that there are more important things in life than losing a football state championship playoff in a “Friday Night Lights” kind of town. When I visited, I noted the county’s History Museum includes photos, signed footballs, jerseys, and trophies, indicating the county’s pride in its high school athletes; and indeed, several well-known and accomplished athletes were raised in the county.

Donnie’s work experience gave him a unique perspective from inside industry and being laid off in a company downsizing process opened the door for him to become a public-school teacher. Realizing that he had a lot to learn about being an educator, he returned to school and earned his bachelor’s, master’s, and specialist degrees. He
currently serves as the Director of the Smallville High School College and Career Academy (CCA). The CCA is a banner accomplishment for Rural County and RCAP, and Donnie’s passion for its ongoing success is evident. For Donnie, Rural County is “home” and he is committed to his community. The thread running through his narrative is his confidence that he can have a positive impact. Due to his work in industry and education, and his leadership in county and city offices, he has perspectives from all these various entities to bring to his experiences of partnering.

**Evelyn.** Evelyn’s narrative is one of guiding citizens by modeling partnering in a deliberative democracy that takes into account all voices and allows for disagreement in consensus building. She recognizes that not everyone will “play well together” and she brings together those who are willing to learn power-sharing and decision-making from within a democratic We identity.

Evelyn was the first RUAP Allied Professional to partner with RCAP and is now the Operations Coordinator who serves as the portal to match University resources to meet community needs. Among her first actions in Rural County was to bring approximately 70 citizens to the Education, Industry, and Business IWG, which was focused on one of the priority issues identified by the initial community-listening session facilitated in Rural County by RUAP.

Even though the community is small (about 9500 in population), Evelyn realized that several of the key leaders in the county did not know each other. Evelyn was intentional about ensuring that the invitations issued to the community represented a wide range of entities to support democratic dialogue and decision-making “to build this integrated network of educators and workforce.”
Thus, Evelyn set up a democratic discourse model for developing other IWGs in RCAP. RCAP partners have experienced the need for all stakeholders in the community to be involved for community development to be effective, and they have begun to assume responsibility to network their resources with each other and to look outside the county for assistance as well.

**Frances.** Frances’s narrative is one of being an outsider to Rural County, while understanding and respecting the strong beliefs of those who grow up in the rural South. In her partnering experiences, she is sensitive to those beliefs, and strategically supports the community in overcoming narratives that are limiting personal and community growth and development.

Frances has experience working in higher education community engagement, though she did not know about “community engagement” as a discipline until our interview. The work that brought her into the RCAP is focused on increasing high school students’ access to higher education and reflects her personal narrative as a first-generation college graduate. Frances recognizes the implications of her outsider position and is committed to her motivation for partnering. She has experienced the shared values that inspire the Partnership and understands the strategic action steps that she can take based on community plans and hope for the future. Her partnering exemplifies mutually beneficial, reciprocal higher education engagement and outreach (Sandmann, Kliwer, Kim, & Omerikwa, 2010).

**Ginny.** Ginny’s partnering has emerged from a strong commitment to staying centered in RCAP’s mission of providing neutral support and resources for the community’s greater good. As the Executive Committee chairperson, she is personally
committed to remaining neutral in RCAP’s determinations of how the greater good is defined through consensus, and ways in which RCAP takes strategic action to create sustainability.

Ginny was one of the original partners in RCAP. She was attending a leadership training when an Operations Coordinator at RUAP approached her about Rural County partnering with Research University to be considered an Allied Partnership Community. Of course, she had to ask, “What’s that?” but once she learned about the concept, she was on board. She returned to Smallville and called the City Manager, who called the Mayor, who then connected with the co-founder of RUAP. The various stakeholders who had expressed interest came together to support the idea.

Ginny became the Chair of the RCAP Executive Committee “by default” when the Operations Coordinator who worked with them to establish RCAP decided that Ginny was in the ideal position to chair the committee. Ginny is a journalist and her family owns the local newspaper, so she does not represent a partner entity and is not a RCAP voting member. Her neutrality allows her to facilitate meetings, offer input, make connections, and support the work of RCAP without being tied to any one entity’s mission—she supports all the partner entities’ missions, and the collective mission of the Partnership. It is interesting to note that she currently sees the Allied Professional and the faculty/students as the “glue and purpose” for the RCAP and does not yet see the community itself being the glue and purpose for strategic action. Ginny voices that she does not perceive a motivation from within RCAP to sustain the local Partnership.
Final Group Inquiry

Six of the seven participants who shared their partnering stories with me gathered for a facilitated group inquiry into their summary narratives. Each of the six had previously read their own narrative profile and the summary narrative that I had crafted from our individual interviews together. Each participant indicated that they felt their voice and story had been represented authentically in the narrative profile and summary narrative. Evelyn was not able to be present for the Group Inquiry, but we did reflect during the discussion on points of her influence on the participants’ partnering experiences.

I introduced three main ideas to structure the discussion: (a) the concepts of collective impact and backbone organizations; (b) Ganz’ public narrative constructs using Self, Us, Now to structure their narrative profiles, and, (c) a focus on how they want to “be” together as partners, and not so much on “what” they want to do together in the Partnership. The participants took time to read each summary narrative and make notes regarding what stood out for them in each one. We then walked through each Summary and talked about their experiences of partnering as highlighted in the Summaries.

After walking through each participant’s summary narrative as a group, six of the seven study participants reached an understanding together that “partnering” (in the context of their higher education community engagement process) means to support community, and that community is defined as “embracing experiences and stories in the diversity of the collective.” Partnering in higher education community engagement, to this group of partners meant embracing, caring, and bringing the heart to their partnering,
The study participants discussed what it would mean to invite others, rather than assume that everyone knows participation in RCAP is open to all citizens, whether those citizens are civic officials or people who are typically socially marginalized. They considered the need to reach out and invite, as well as the need to “stop wasting your time” when someone refused to partner with them. I suggested that they might pay attention to who is missing in their conversations, and how RCAP might reach out and invite diverse and new voices to join. All of them mentioned the experience of being in a meeting and hearing a new and beneficial perspective to which they would never have been exposed had they not been in the meeting that was initiated by the local Partnership.

The group recognized that the Christy, the Allied Professional, has influence and credibility inside and outside of the local Partnership, serves as a neutral intermediary, has knowledge about resources, and has dedicated time for fulfilling infrastructure tasks, such as scheduling, communicating, connecting people, facilitating meetings, which are all roles of community impact backbone organizations (Garber & Adams, 2017). I suggested for the group to consider that the successes RCAP has achieved were not accomplished by the University’s work alone; rather, the community has collaborated with RUAP to achieve its goals. Even though the University has provided a forum and resources, the community chose to take advantage of the opportunities offered and put them to use. They will need to harness that same determination to move forward in their decisions regarding sustainability.

**Conclusion**

In the next chapter, the narrative threads that were braided (Farner, 2016) among the study participants’ stories are presented through the lens of Ganz’ (2009, 2011)
constructs of public narrative, highlighting those experiences of Self, Us, Now that floated up through an analysis, while recognizing that there are infinite possibilities of meanings in all our stories.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

This study is an inquiry into narratives of partnering in a collective impact community-engaged partnership located in a rural, southeastern United States community. The partnering experiences of the study participants were revealed as the participants and I made connections within their lived, told, relived, and retold stories about the local Partnership. By *stories*, I suggest the participants’ telling of their experiences, by *narratives*, I suggest the meanings of their experiences. In exploring partnering, this study was not so much interested in the doing of partnership, but rather the being of partnering, that is, how the participants were *being* as partners in the *doing* of the Partnership; how they were relating inward (personally) and outward (socially) across time in a Partnership located in a particular place and history.

As the experiences of the study participants illustrate, the realities of public narrative—of the stories, meanings, and impacts of Self, Us, Now—are more similar to the metaphor of complex *braided* experiences (Farner, 2016, p. 166). Farner offers a model (used in this study as a metaphor) that effectively holds the complexities of relational, institutional, and systemic dynamics occurring simultaneously. Separate identities and experiences are retained yet braided into a whole strand that moves backward and forward in time, each thread being shaped by the other threads with which it is bound in the braid, illuminating the complex, muddled experiences of Self, Us, Now.
Because the concepts are so intertwined, I will designate them together in the analysis from this point as Self/Us/Now.

In this chapter, I will discuss narrative threads that were highlighted by looking at the participants’ experiences through the lens or “keyhole” of Ganz’ (2009, 2011) concepts of public narrative. By modifying and applying Farner’s (2016) adaptive braid model, I will discuss how these threads might inform our being and doing in community-campus partnerships.

**A Relational Matrix Landscape**

Originally this study was designed to explore power and reciprocity in partnering between the community and the campus (see Chapter 2). While the concepts of power and reciprocity were not discussed directly during the inquiry, those dynamics were apparent throughout experiences described by the study participants involved in RCAP, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. Specifically, the study participants involved in this partnership disclosed narrative themes of (a) creating community, (b) building consensus, (c) establishing belonging and expectations, and (d) sustaining the partnership.

I will present each of these narrative themes (or threads) and discuss how they are braided together with public narratives of Self/Us/Now later in this chapter. First, I want discuss the focus of the findings, and to examine the complexity of the relational landscape in a collective impact initiative.

**Focus on Partnering within the Community**

One significant finding in the study was that the relational landscape of RCAP did not conform to the “us/them” partnership between the university and the community often referenced theoretically in the engaged scholarship literature. By definition,
“[c]ommunity engagement describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities” (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.). However, as mentioned previously, institutions don’t collaborate, people do.

There is significant research focused on relationships in CES. As discussed in Chapter 2, Hoyt (2011) stated clarified that “human relationships, particularly those that are resilient and capable of thriving through adversity, are the most critical element for achieving sustained engagement” (p. 282). Most considerations of partnering in the literature, however, are focused on the challenges of partnerships between the two monolithic entities: community and campus.

On the whole in this study, the partners with whom I interacted held value and respect for the knowledge, wisdom, and experiences of the other partners (Janke, 2008). When this research study began, power-sharing and reciprocity between the university and community partners was already well-established. Trust and equitable partnering between the university and the community partners was entrenched in the first several years of the Partnership. At the point in their history when I jumped in the proverbial river with them, I found that the most significant relational dynamics impacting the Partnership were not between the university and the community, but within the community itself.

Further, the community was not a monolithic entity, any more than a large, research university was. While there was an established hierarchy in RCAP, with the Executive Committee making decisions about projects, and the IWGs reporting to the Executive Committee, the study participants were enacting leadership in various capacities in the community, establishing reciprocal relationships among themselves and
with other community partners. For instance, Bonita (described by one IWG member as “the quintessential volunteer”) led the development of a local non-profit to independently guide an environmental project originated within RCAP. Abigail gathered a group of interested women in the community to create a Women’s IWG that worked with the schools to decrease teen pregnancy. Frances partnered with the local school system to apply for and receive a federal grant that is now funding her work with the high school to prepare students for access to higher education. Donnie worked diligently with the Education, Business, and Industry IWG to establish and now lead the CCA, which has also now received a Ford Foundation designation and grant.

People do not relate directly with entities, we relate with other people, and the people in a rural Southern community bring historical narratives across multiple generations and have countless significant experiences among them in various local settings and situations over their lifetimes. They tell, retell, live and relive stories from their collective history, from several generations in their families, and from their childhood and adolescence together, into their adulthood and current relationships. As one participant said when discussing a conflict with another citizen in Smallville: “Yeah, well, we know each other; we grew up together,” indicating experiences between them were traveling across time and impacting their present partnering.

Additionally, to complicate the matter, partners from outside the community bring their personal narratives and previous partnering experiences to the community as well. While I grew up in a small Southern town next to a large research university, my narratives were still different from the study participants in many ways. Significantly, for instance, the university near my hometown provides jobs, whereas in Rural County, the
jobs have declined with the closing and selling of the two largest employers. I had to recognize there were differences in our experiences. As an outsider, I could not assume that my perspectives from growing up in a small Southern town were similar to the study participants’ perspectives.

**Collective Impact Initiatives and Shifting Partners**

RCAP is a collective impact partnership (Garber & Adams, 2017; Kania & Kramer, 2011) as discussed in Chapter 4. In a collective impact initiative there are multiple entities engaged in the partnership, both from within and outside of the community. The people who represent all those entities bring their own personal, familial, and historical narratives, along with representing the narratives of their respective organizations and entities. Moreover, the representatives change in their perspectives over the years of a sustained partnership. For example, Bonita shared that she changed course and determined to be intentional about choosing to be in support of projects she knew to be positive for the community, instead of being in opposition to those she feared were detrimental, as she had done originally in her partnering actions.

Further, the representatives assigned by the entities change, meaning that people with differing narratives step in and out of the partnership. For instance, during the history of RCAP, the local Chamber of Commerce had staff and leadership turn-over, the Rural County administration had several leadership changes, and, the RUAP Allied Professional changed. All these shifting partners have an impact on the relational landscape of the Partnership.
A Relational Matrix

Connections across time, place and people created a complex and shifting relationship matrix in the community. This matrix is the landscape upon which, and through which, the Partnership was built over time. In Figure 4, I have depicted interactions between the various partners I encountered during the study, providing a sense for the complexities of relationships within the Partnership.

Figure 4. Complex relational matrix in a collective impact initiative.
Of course, the figure represents only a portion of the local Partnership and only the surface of the full matrix of relationships within and surrounding RCAP that were impacting the Partnership in numerous ways. Additionally, we could map the same complexities within each entity in the Partnership. The illustration is two-dimensional, but the reality is at least seven-dimensional, with inward and outward relating through the past, present and future within the context of the County’s environment and history. Add onto the landscape the environments and histories of the multiple partnering entities and the matrix expands into an almost infinite relational complexity.

It would not be possible for RCAP to find its way through these expanding social ambiguities and complexities (Nicolaides, 2015) without focusing on several agreed-upon goals, which was the initial organizing action taken by RCAP. Similarly, to limit the scope of this study, I considered only the relationships revealed to me in the participants’ stories and while observing, reading and exploring the meanings of partnering in RCAP.

**Narrative Threads and Public Narratives**

The relationships I encountered, though with only a small portion of the partners, were rich and revealing for my understanding of partnering in the context of engaged scholarship. Within the matrix of relationships and partnering experiences I encountered, I found four main narrative threads, or clusters of partnering experiences, that seemed to braid together through the study participants’ narratives of Self/Us/Now. By *narrative threads*, I suggest those meanings of experiences that are related or similar, are in tension or paradox with each other, or that point to and highlight partnering in RCAP. Certainly, other threads could be identified; these are the threads that stood out to me from the participants’ narratives through the lenses of my own partnering experiences and public
narratives. Table 4 lists the narrative threads identified and the experiences that pointed to them within the participants’ public narratives of Self/Us/Now.

Table 4

*Narrative Threads, Partnering Experiences, Public Narratives*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Threads</th>
<th>Partnering Experiences</th>
<th>Public Narratives</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating Community</td>
<td>Caring Deeply about Community</td>
<td>Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating a We Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overcoming Limiting Narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Consensus</td>
<td>Democracy 101</td>
<td>Us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overcoming Power Inequities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Removing Barriers to Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establishing Boundaries</td>
<td>Belonging from the Outside</td>
<td>Self</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Intentional Belonging</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Valuing of Positive Participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sustaining the Partnership</td>
<td>Narrative Inquiry Practices</td>
<td>Now</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neutrality in Convening</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Moreover, these threads, or clusters of experiences do not reflect the complexity of partnering—the muddled mess of moving inward and outward in relational spaces of public narratives, while moving backward and forward through time. The threads are merely tools for discussion. In reality, the threads are connected and interwoven, creating a braid of partnering experiences (a “narrative tail” one study partner quipped) that are both separate and yet bound together, each strand impacting the direction of the others. One experience might point to several narrative threads, and other narrative threads are certainly imaginable within the participants’ accounts of partnering experiences. The narrative threads woven into a braid with public narratives are represented in Figure 5, with the double-ended arrows indicating their interactive, interwoven, interconnected
nature. A discussion follows of each narrative thread braided within the participants’
public narratives of Self/Us/Now.

![Diagram showing narrative threads and public narratives]

**Figure 5.** Narrative threads and public narratives braided together in partnering.

While the discussion could begin with experiences of Now and Self that are
pulling on experiences of Us within the braid, I will begin with initial public narratives of
Self, which will pull on interactive narratives of Us and Now. The threads that resonated
through the narratives emerged from several different accounts by the participants during
the individual interviews and group inquiries that occurred over time within the inquiry.

**Creating Community**

In RCAP conversation and meetings in which I was involved or observed, the
general assumption in discussions was that “community” meant Rural County; the two
terms where used synonymously. The study participants spoke of the community as
being bounded by county lines. But beyond their usual definition of community as a place, another definition of community emerged over the course of the group inquiry. When I asked the final inquiry group what they meant by community, Abigail defined community as: “Embracing experiences and stories from the diversity of the collective, of the We, as others nodded their agreement. Ginny summed it up as: “Embracing the heart, caring,” to which the group offered their consent. As they discussed in their reflection on Donnie’s narrative, “community” to this inquiry group meant “bringing our hearts.” It seemed the first and foremost partnering experience to them was caring deeply about the good of the community. The personal values (Self) that brought these participants into RCAP were their genuine concern for others in the community, as well as for the community as a whole.

Caring Deeply About the Community or “Bringing Our Hearts”

I witnessed this public narrative of Self—that of bringing their hearts—both spoken and unspoken, in several different stories and observations, in diverse ways. The study participants were involved in RCAP apparently because they cared deeply about their community and wanted to improve the quality of life there. Helen stated during the wrap-up of the first group inquiry:

I think overall our community loves our community. People in [this room] love our community. I'm not saying everybody does, but I think that we try really hard to support our own in our community. … I think that's one reason the Partnership is successful here, too, is the community wants it to be.

The group talked about leaders showing up for meetings or sending a representative, even though they all have full schedules at work, indicating their caring for the Partnership and
the We identity they have built together over six years. They tell with pride stories of people in other towns being envious of the caring and collaborative efforts that are becoming commonplace in Rural County.

The final inquiry group expressed passionate concern for the community’s youth and wanting to create a “heritage” for them in which they can take pride. Bonita’s collaboration with the high school to get students involved in environmental projects was a story of bringing her heart for the environment and for future generations’ connections with the land and history that surrounds them and sustains them.

The group focused on Donnie’s Self narrative of “bringing the heart” to their experiences of partnering. He summarized their discussion with a rhetorical question: “Do we have our heart in this, or are we just coming to the meetings because our boss man said we need to sit in for him.” They were in concurrence that their involvement was motivated by caring, not because of a work assignment, even though several of them were representing their employer in their participation. The group recognized Donnie’s narrative of caring and his confidence that he can have a positive impact on his community, or as Ganz (2011) said the narrative that “You Can Make a Difference—YCMAD” (p. 279). The group wondered where Donnie’s confidence originated. He shared that his confidence came from others in the community believing in him, supporting him, and encouraging him, which was a powerful experience of how shared narratives can assist with building both confidence in Self and a stronger Us narrative.

The final group participants discussed how important it is that they care about and encourage each other in the community. Abigail stated from her own experience: “It’s amazing what the confidence of your community will do for you. … It’s that invitation
that we’ve been talking about all the way [through the discussion].” I suggested they might reflect on ways in which they can provoke that same kind of confidence for each other; ways in which they each can take up leadership to build up the others’ confidence in themselves and their partnering.

Creating a We Identity and Sharing Resources to Meet Needs

In every interview and group discussion, the study participants reiterated how significant it was for them to meet and inform each other of the community’s needs and resources as identified by each of the entities they represent; this practice is central in their experiences of partnering and public narratives of Self. The participants recognized and clearly stated they are aware they each have agendas and needs to meet and resources to share. On one hand, this shared resourcing was one value that pulled them together; on the other hand, none of them is ready to take a neutral position in order to facilitate or mediate between opposing agendas. And it seems they have not recognized they could rotate that role, or use other means to act strategically in the Now regarding meeting that particular need of the Partnership as a whole.

In her role representing the RUAP, Christy reiterated the need for the community partners to be involved in as many meetings as their schedules will allow, since it is their collective participation which makes RCAP work. Their partnering includes coming to the table, sharing their Self stories, and talking about what is happening in each of the IWGs, who has a need, and who has a resource to meet that need, or sharing a networking contact who can assist with meeting that need. Christy talked about this process: “Sometimes it's not the project that you're working on, or the end result [that is
important], it's those relationships that are built through that process.” By sharing Self narratives, agendas, and resources, the braid is tightened and an Us identity is created.

Christy gave an example of a representative from one of the partner entities who attends multiple IWG meetings that are not necessarily focused on the needs of his entity, but he is listening for ways in which his entity can be a resource for others, and for ways in which he can share information or make connections to support others. As Christy explained, “That [information] doesn’t necessarily apply to the “me” of [his entity], but it applies to the We of the community.” Christy’s focus was not so much on what this partner is doing in terms of projects and tasks, but on how he is being in his community, that is, available, attentive, caring, resourcing, networking, searching for ways to collaborate. His Self narrative of valuing the community is braided with the RCAP Us narrative that encourages interactive support in the community. In the first group inquiry, Ivan stated the experience this way:

I think also, indirectly, by putting those people on [an IWG] committee together, you force them to get to know each other better and to work cooperatively better, because these are people of like minds. [They realize], “I could see why that's an issue; I need to be cognizant of that.” Or, “I can help them on that, that's something I can do.”

I summarized that it seemed that the Executive Committee leaders network in their areas and connect their people in the IWGs, and that is where community is, that is where the We of community happens; where citizens are braiding their narratives of Self and Us.
Overcoming Limiting Narratives and Extending Invitations

During the dialogue in the final inquiry group, the experiences of creating community extended to considering who is not involved in RCAP, and how to widen the circle to include others. I suggested to the study participants that folks sometimes do not realize they are welcome to join. Just because we advertise the meeting is open, does not mean that people feel welcome; sometimes people need to be invited—especially if they have been marginalized in other ways. Sometimes long-standing narratives and traditions draw boundaries of which we may not even be aware, we are so used to them being there; or, from within our own narratives, we do not perceive them.

Interestingly, no one in any of the meetings or interviews mentioned the absence of people of color in those meetings. The narrative of barriers to whole populations in their community was a null; those stories were not voiced in the study. The several times I asked about who was not present, the responses were regarding Hispanic ethnicities. It was interesting to notice that African-Americans were generally not mentioned when I asked who was not included in RCAP, even though in the 2010 census approximately 10% of the county population was Hispanic, while approximately 29% was Black or African American (U.S. Census Bureau, DATE). It is prevalent practice to invite people we know and those with whom we are familiar and comfortable, instead of reaching beyond our respective communities to invite people we do not know and with whom we ostensibly do not have commonalities. RCAP study participants did not appear to be an exception to the social practice that keeps us within our social comfort zones.

Frances gave an example of the impact of being invited from within her experience of partnering in RCAP: “I came because Christy asked me to. I was actually
truly invited. I came because I was invited to come and then because I brought my role and I sat down and started to listen to everybody else’s role, I realized I could be part of the We. Frances’ narrative of bringing her Self motives to RCAP and joining with the Us motives could be replicated for those who are residents in the county, but who do not feel as though they belong, who have not been invited, who feel as though they are “outsiders” to the local Partnership, or maybe don’t even know about RCAP and how they could participate.

Frances offered an example of how limiting Self narratives can prevent people from accessing resources available to us, in her case, higher education:

We understand the importance of education, but often in communities, especially in Southern communities … and I think this is a fear of small rural communities, if we educate our students, we're over-educating them. They won't be able to live in Smallville and raise a family. Our little small town is going to die because they're going to have to move to [the city to work]. … And a lot of people don't want their children to be educated because they're afraid they're going to leave their town.

She continued thinking aloud with reflexivity on her own partnering and what extending invitations might mean to those who do not feel welcomed to participate in the community:

It's actually made me rethink, “How am I doing things? Am I coming to these meetings with just my “me” hat on, or am I coming and actually inviting people to be a part of my world … I think this has been instrumental for me to reframe my thinking on how we actually invite, not just open. … [For example], we as
educators can say, ‘Anybody can go to college. You can do this if you want to.’ But if you come from a background that [declares] college was never for you—or whatever it is—like you weren't welcome in whatever it is that you're doing. If you've never felt that way, what if [we say], ‘Yeah but it's open, you can show up to this if you want to’ [versus] reaching out and actually inviting that child or inviting that parent, because that's our world [and they may not know they are welcome].

The narrative inquiry process allowed for Frances to reflect on her own experiences of partnering, that is, being invited and realizing she could belong in the We of RCAP, and how those experiences might inform the ways in which she will be in her future partnering. Creating community includes extending invitations and widening the circle to include others and their understandings of community.

**Building Consensus from a Diversity of Perspectives**

University partners and community partners in the study all voiced the need for diversity of perspectives in RCAP, both to strengthen the caring community and the project action plans and implementation of those plans to reach agreed-upon goals. Interestingly, the university partners talked about diversity through concepts of democracy, while the community partners talked about diversity in terms of widening their personal worldviews and perspectives, while diversities of race and ethnicity were not on the table for discussion.

Katherine R. Adams (2013) interviewed 10 leaders in three different Allied Partnerships across the State, including RCAP. Her research also revealed a lack of
racial diversity in those Allied Partnerships. She recommended exploring barriers and opening pathways for racial and ethnic inclusion in Allied Partnership Communities.

**Democracy 101**

As mentioned in her narrative portrait in Chapter 4, Evelyn shared that she intentionally invited a wide range of entities and citizens to participate in the Business, Industry and Education IWG. She was purposefully supporting democratic dialogue and decision-making “to build this integrated network of educators and workforce.” Thus, a democratic model—inviting participation in decision-making from all voices and perspectives—was established for developing other IWGs in the Partnership. RCAP partners have experienced that the involvement of all stakeholders in the community is needed for effective community development, yet some populations are still not represented in the Partnership.

Several stories were told throughout the inquiry process about community partners beginning to pick up responsibility to network their resources with each other. Both Christy and Evelyn noted that community partners have begun to call each other regarding needs and resources, or add the concern to a meeting agenda, rather than contacting the Allied Professional for assistance to network resources for them. These narratives of Self are contributing to the development of narratives of Us.

Christy and Evelyn both voiced their prior professional experiences of building trust and cooperation through genuine caring about the wellbeing of people and their communities. As representatives of RUAP, they both quickly joined with the Rural County community by meeting with and caring about its citizens. They modeled building an identity of We by leading RCAP in small victories in which the partners could learn
about each other’s resources and needs, have opportunities to act on their caring about each other, and learn to trust each other. Echoing Christy’s statement about the process being as important as the project, Evelyn noted:

   For me, that’s the value of bringing all those people together . . . they get to meet each other. They build trust over time. They see where they can leverage their resources. It adds value to what they do in their work every day, and ultimately raises up the community.

Evelyn cited RCAP achieving a large, multi-year, collective project as evidence of their capacity to overcome severe blocks in the process, and proved proving their enthusiasm and commitment to get it done. . . every partner at that table was super-motivated to make sure that goal was achieved, and they did. They got it. Everybody had a piece and a part, and it was amazing that everybody got on board.

This project was co-owned by all entities, there was no turf to be protected. Everyone had a stake in the outcome, so the partners were able to share decision-making, share power, and work together toward achieving their agreed-upon goal.

Evelyn reiterated, “If we can transfer the work and the model of Allied into their way of being; if we've taught them how to fish, we've been successful.” What Evelyn calls the “Allied Effect” is bringing people together in democratic discourse and consensus-building, as narratives of Us begin to generate strategic actions in the Now.
Overcoming Power Inequities and Marginalization

While power-sharing is becoming more established in RCAP, there are yet narratives of Self in which power is used to exclude people or perspectives. Power in this study, as discussed in Chapter 2, is defined as the “capacity to produce intended results” (Himmelman, 2001, p. 278). While mutual sharing of power would allow for all concerned to reach a consensus decision, there are still spaces in Rural County in which traditional, patriarchal hierarchies of power remain, in which only the few have access to decision-making and the “capacity to produce intended results.” Bonita’s experiences of partnering exemplified this particular status quo, which becomes complex when multiple relationships in space and place are acted out, sometimes over the course of decades and multiple generations.

From my life experience, it seems allegiances and betrayals, personalities and personas, shifts in commitments and loyalties, actions taken to protect self rather than care for other, forgiveness withheld, and grudges held onto, all impact power and decision-making capacities in a community. I am thinking of our attraction to Shakespearean drama, or to television reality shows as I write about this experience. We are drawn to dramas of power in art and entertainment because they are real to us; we see ourselves and our experiences play out in the performance.

Bonita retells of being in opposition to an expensive county-wide project that has drained resources and brought much tension and “bumping against” (Clandinin, 2013) among various entities and citizens in the county for decades. Her concerns were primarily ecological and economic, and she supported litigation to stop the project. Those who opposed the project lost the lawsuit, and the project is moving forward;
however, her opposition put her front and center in Rural County in ways she had not anticipated. Her story—as told by others—became one of being against the county’s prime project and draining county resources due to efforts to protect the project from litigation. There was a narrative created that she was in opposition to the County—which was now synonymous with the project—and to those who were supporting the project and had decision-making power in the county.

As Ganz (2011) noted, if we don’t tell our own story, others will make one up for us based on their own perspectives. He contends we are responsible as leaders to tell our stories of Self authentically, including both joys and pains, in order to contribute to the development of the Us.

Bonita was intentional in her response to the negative narrative, which initially emerged due to her concerns for the environment and economy. She determined to be in support of other projects in the county, rather than be in opposition to one, so she turned her focus to champion other environmental, historical, and outdoor recreational projects. She found, however, that the opposition narrative had followed her into her support of other projects. For example, when she proposed a project to the County Commissioners, the question was raised by one Commissioner, “But weren’t you part of the law suit against us?” She realized the current project was not being considered due to the narrative from the past experiences.

Noting that the projects were important, but her leadership was a hindrance at this point, Bonita created a partnership “from the margin” within the RCAP. In order to create a work-around for gaining the support of the County Commissioners for the outdoor recreational and eco-friendly projects she was proposing, she partnered with the Allied
Professional to become the voice to present the projects to the Commissioners. After that, she began to partner with other citizens to gather support for eco-friendly projects.

Bonita stated she is not concerned about “credit” for the projects, she is concerned about the projects moving forward, and she is very willing to work from the margins and in the background if necessary to make them happen. Bonita has taken strategic steps to implement environmental projects, partnering with several entities in the county to move those projects forward while creating collaborative connections.

Now Bonita is telling her own story and partnering with others in the community, rather than deferring to RUAP’s leadership. Her story is an example of how bringing more partners to join together in support of each other strengthens the narrative of Us, and increases the motivation to act strategically in the Now.

**Removing Barriers to Participation—Opening Space for Self Narratives**

When I asked who was not included in RCAP, several of the participants mentioned Hispanic people. In our individual interview, Donnie related an experience of realizing that language was a barrier for parents of Hispanic students not participating in school events, even events in which their children were being honored or receiving awards and scholarships. At first Donnie thought the problem was cultural. He suggested that the parents were more focused on working and earning a living for their families than they were on their children’s education.

As he retold the story of one student, he recalled her mentioning that her parents didn’t attend an important ceremony because of their embarrassment and isolation due to not speaking English fluently. He was reminded how easy it would be to have translators at every school event, thus removing the barrier felt by these parents. In his retelling of
the story, he reminded himself of a simple solution to remove a barrier for inclusion and widen the access to partnering in the community. Donnie’s story highlights the significance for creating community of an awareness of barriers to inclusion.

Establishing Boundaries and Participation Expectations

Belonging/not belonging was a strong thread that ran through the partnering narratives. In an IWG meeting that I observed, one of the members openly stated, “I’m not from here,” even though the fact was already known by the members and seemed apparent to the visitors by her speech dialect. Interestingly, she felt compelled to make the statement during their discussion, reiterating the significance of the narrative thread. The narrative threads of belonging in narratives of Self and Us were braided through several different interviews, group inquiries, and meetings.

Belonging from the Outside

On the one hand, Frances experiences herself as an “outsider” to the community, which she shared with me early on in our interview: “Well, I’m an outsider, I’m not from Smallville.” Not belonging shines a bright light on the importance of belonging in a rural, Southern community, and further, how belonging/not belonging impacts partnering. Frances shares that not only is she an “outsider,” but she is from the “evil town down the road.” Belonging becomes especially significant when not only do you not belong, but you could even be perceived as the “enemy.” Yet, with careful attention to this significant characteristic of Southern culture and vital element of partnering, Frances has been able to establish herself as a caring member of RCAP—she has proven that brings her heart in her narratives of Self. While not residing within the County boundaries, she is nonetheless considered as a caring member of the Partnership community.
Frances grew up in Nexton, located a few miles down the highway in the County to the east of Rural. Nexton has historically been the standard to which Smallville has compared itself—and in the comparison, Smallville always seems to come up lacking. Historically, Smallville folks don’t take kindly to Nexton folks coming over to tell Smallville folks how to improve the community. (See Rural County in Chapter Four.) So, when in Smallville/Rural County, Frances stays quiet about her ties to Nexton. She may point out, however, that her father graduated from Smallville High School, and that her cousins are Smallville natives, which makes a difference in how Smallville/Rural County people receive her. In her experience, when she connects Smallville folks with her family ties in Smallville, they treat her as if she belongs, which is not uncommon in Southern culture. If your “people” are from here, then you are one of us—is the experience I had growing up.

Being clearly aware of not belonging in the community, Frances is extremely deliberate in her partnering actions. For example, in the final group inquiry, when she introduced herself, she stated she was from “across the river” knowing full-well that everyone in the room would know the place to which she was referring (even I knew), but she never once actually spoke the name of the town. Rather, she has been intentional in respecting the community’s knowledge and resources, and discovering how she might be of service to them first, which is a strategic action of reciprocity, enacted in the Now:

Even though I’ve done things like this for over 15 years [referencing the work in higher education that she is now providing for Rural County], I’m not going to come in and force my opinion, because what do I know? I may have some ideas,
but you know your community, and you know what your community needs. So, how can I help the community… how can I help you get to where you need to be?

Frances is connected with a higher education entity in her work with RCAP. Her way of being in her partnering is the epitome of what is meant by reciprocity in higher education, that is, respect for the knowledge, wisdom, and values of all partners (Dostilio et al., 2012). Frances entered RCAP being intentional about learning from the community and building reciprocity with others before she offered any suggestions. Reciprocity that generates a new narrative of equity shifts power and allows for access to decision-making by everyone concerned. Again, the impacts of this way of partnering are significant for the local Partnership and the community. For example, Frances partnered with the Rural County school system to acquire a grant that targets high school students’ access to higher education.

**Intentional Belonging**

On the other hand was Abigail’s narrative of Self and experience of moving into the community and being intentional about her family becoming concerned, connected, rooted members of the community. While her husband is a professional, and it was recommended for them to remain in exclusive social circles, this was not their choice for their family. She stated in our individual interview:

> We became part of the community. … We belong to Smallville, and Smallville belongs to us. … Even though we are not native, people treat us like we’re native. … [Smallville] is my heart. … This is home, and I fight for Rural County when I go [to represent the County in statewide forums].
Abigail acknowledged in the final group inquiry that she arrived in Smallville with the intention of immersing herself in the community before she began to participate in community concerns, which is also an enactment of reciprocity. As she stated, “You know, you need to go to the hog show on Monday night, … and see what those kids are doing at the football game on Friday night.” Her partnering experiences and public narratives are immersed in and emerge from her deep sense of belonging in her community.

The group pointed out that many people who grew up in Rural County are not as involved as Abigail, and they wondered about how to widen the Partnership circle. The discussion about inviting people ensued, even those whom we may assume “should” belong and be involved but who are not. I noted to the group that everyone has their own narrative of Self from which they are living, and we don’t know what they may be experiencing as a barrier to their participation. One strategic action to break down barriers is to invite others to join with us.

**Valuing of Positive Participation—Narratives of Us**

There were several stories shared by individuals that indicated experiences in which the Partnership opens participation to all County citizens, but also expects participants to be positive in their actions. I did not observe censorship of people who may voice differing views, but there were stories that indicated a point at which participants must show an intention to support the consensus agenda, or the Partnership will move forward without them to accomplish their agreed-upon goals. This narrative of Us, while seeming to exclude dissenters, seemed more to protect the Partnership from
being stalemated by negative people who did not appear interested in joining, but rather were in attendance to push their individual agendas.

For instance, Donnie related an experience with a citizen who does not live in the County but owns and runs a business there. Donnie retold the moment when this man not only expressed dissention in a meeting but denigrated the efforts of the community to create a new educational entity for supporting workforce development. When Donnie mentioned this person in the final inquiry group, several of the participants shared that they had experienced this person’s negative ire in several situations.

Donnie retold his personal experience: “It was beautiful to see the different people from the different areas of the Partnership stand up” and respond that the project may not be best for his business, but it is good for the County overall. A clear narrative of Us had been generated in the community at that time, which they were motivated to protect. The intention expressed by the group was to include everyone—invitations went out for open participation. At the same time, participation was expected to be generative rather than disparaging, or as Donnie called it, “naysaying.”

Abigail’s experiences of partnering include being urged to meet with a local politician who holds opposing political views to Abigail’s. She was reluctant to meet with the politician due to the stereotypes she held of her but was surprised to learn they held many of the same values. She shared her narrative of Self, “It’s how I learn; it’s how I grow as a person, to see different sides of a story, whatever it is.” Through her experiences with RCAP, she now recognizes the importance of making connections to “be a community,” rather than operating as isolated entities. Yet, her experiences also included “not partnering” when other citizens make it clear after numerous attempts to
include them that they were interested only in pushing their own agenda, and they refused to join in a We identity and work toward consensus.

Several study participants told about making decisions to “create a work-around” when there was someone in the community who continued to cause disruption in meetings rather than participate to reach consensus. Donnie, Abigail, Christy, and Ginny all mentioned experiences with citizens who refused to participate in reaching consensus within RCAP and were not invited to meetings in the future. Again, the practice of moving on never had a sense of intentionally excluding or blocking participation of another citizen; rather, the stories conveyed a practice of setting boundaries for the Partnership that valued consensus and positive participation.

**Sustaining the Partnership**

Through the inquiry, not only did my understanding of RCAP increase, but so did the understandings of the study participants as they realized insights about themselves and each other. In response to reading their narrative profiles, several of the final inquiry group participants commented that they saw themselves in the profiles clearly, but they had not thought of their partnering in those ways before reading their profile. As the final inquiry closed, the group recommended the process for others in RCAP, and I realized the narrative inquiry process has served to strengthen their partnering practices and their narratives of Us.

The possibilities for implementing narrative inquiry as a practice to support decision-making about sustaining the partnership was mentioned. That is, it might be useful for a larger group of partners to experience the narrative inquiry process in order to locate themselves and each other inside their partnering commitments for sustaining
RCAP. Strengthening their narratives of Self and Us could provide motivation for strategic action to sustain the Partnership. The more commitment the partners have to each other and to RCAP, the more likely they are to take actions to preserve the Partnership. The tighter the braid of partnering experiences and public narratives, the difficult it will be to unravel it.

**Narrative Inquiry as a Partnering Practice**

This narrative inquiry was designed to include a practice of considering partnering experiences over time in the three relational spaces of Self/Us/Now as proposed by Ganz (2009). Participants explored their self-motivations for joining the Partnership; their experiences in creating a We identity in the Partnership; and their motivations for strategic action in the present, or Now. Bonita summarized her experience of the process: “I appreciate people's personal perspectives about what motivated you and what makes you, and what developed your storylines, your narratives.” Abigail stated:

I thought it was very helpful and it was another example of how this whole Partnership thing works so well. Yeah, I thought I understood [the Partnership], but to have everybody's different perspective; it was good. … I think it’s insightful … it’s so powerful because it’s coming from all of us.

Ginny was one of three RCAP partners who participated in the full inquiry process—from first inquiry group, through individual interviews and reviewing the narrative profiles and summary narratives, to the final inquiry group. She described her experience of the narrative inquiry process this way: “I didn’t know how you were going to wrap all this up when we first started, [but] this was amazing!” She wondered if it
might be possible to walk the full Executive Committee through the process. Bonita also wondered if the Executive Committee could experience the process to support their leadership in envisioning sustainability:

Because I mean, this was powerful … in the sense of embracing our community and the partners in the community. If they experienced it, then maybe that would renew energy within them for developing a mission … Because if we don't get one, and if we don't embrace outsiders and unknowns …

Christy and Ginny suggested maybe they could recommend the narrative inquiry process as part of the Executive Committee retreat this summer.

**Neutral Championing, Coaching, and Convening**

Christy’s experiences of partnering with RCAP began when it “was a little more mature’ [that is], most of the stakeholders had already developed some good skills in working with each other.” She has built relationships as a community developer, joined with RCAP in their We identity, and is wondering how to support the partners as they consider sustainability. As RCAP answers the question, “How will we, as a community, sustain initiatives and partnerships that currently exist?” Christy will have worked herself out of partnering with RCAP. Others from within the community will then fulfill the roles of convener(s) and coach(es) for the community.

RUAP, through Evelyn and then Christy, has served in the roles of a “backbone organization” in this collective impact partnership (Garber & Adams, 2017). Once RCAP creates a process by which they can fulfill their own backbone organization roles, RUAP will withdraw from being directly involved in RCAP, though there will still be University resourcing connections available to the community.
In interviews about fulfilling the convening and coaching roles (among others), the participants were all unclear about how that will occur in the future. One hindrance is that all the partners are aware of bringing their representative entities’ agendas and issues to the table, while the convener must remain neutral to hold a collaborative space for trust to emerge. In the first group inquiry Christy described her role in this way:

There's no motive at the table for the [RUAP] other than the building of a better, more functional, and more sustainable community … at least initially. Now, once you've built that trust, whoever the ongoing person is, are they housed at the Chamber or the City, you know? Who knows what that ends up looking like. It looks like different things in different places. But, initially, I think for that convener to be, not removed but ... very neutral, I think is helpful in building the trust. Because you can sort of intervene if there is a friction [among agendas].

Ginny’s role, as the Executive Committee chairperson, has also been one of neutral champion, but she intimated in the final group inquiry that she is ready for someone else to pick up that role: “I was thinking about the freshness and the revolving. The only reason that I have remained [as chairperson] is because I’m the only non-funding [partner].” And, in the first group inquiry, she voiced the concern that all the participants voiced: “Somehow, we have to figure out a way to continue the connection [after the University partner withdraws].” Ginny readily admits that she does not believe the partners have the motivation for sustainability. Ivan concurred with Ginny:

Some organization will really have to step up to keep this synergy going or some new organization will have to rise up that can continue. It has to be intentional. Very, very deliberate and somebody has to have the responsibility of doing it or
we'll start fading back. Because, you know, you're not going to be in your position forever [referring to Christy], you won't be in your position forever [referring to the partners in the room], and I won't be in my position forever and the next generation won't know what they are supposed to do.

This sense of not knowing what to do next, and not being willing to create a vision for what’s next was replicated in the final inquiry group also. Bonita stated she thought the narrative inquiry process

felt really good and enlightening until you [laughing and referring to me] left us with this sort of ... like it's on us now. ... If we don’t pick up the [accountability] to make it happen, it’s not going to happen. It’ll be dead … if we can’t get a collaborative of partnerships going towards that, then we’ll just sort of dwindle back down to feeling at odds with each other; it’s so important, I think, to embrace this. Because this [inquiry process] was powerful.

Abigail stated she believed there will have to be a “catalyst just to get our community to create a partner professional not directly from the University Partnership,” though she didn’t say what she thinks that catalyst might be other than losing the Allied Professional. Ganz (2008) referenced a sense of urgency as a motivation in response to inertia. He suggested a story of Now that “transforms the present into a moment of challenge, hope, and choice” (para. 4), and he used public narratives as a tool for translating values into action.

The study participants do not yet see that the entire RCAP partnering process has been about building leadership as a collaborative community impact project. The Partnership is about providing a structure for them to “practice” partnering in deliberative
democracy and consensus-building, so that they have the relationships, skills, knowledge, and experience to do this independent of RUAP. The participants’ partnering experiences are the fertile soil in which they have capacity to plant the seeds of sustainability. As I mentioned to Christy in our individual interview, either RCAP will plant those seeds in the community, or they won’t. Good coaches allow their protégés space in the relationship to develop their own path. RUAP will eventually have to leave the community, which might allow space for the community partners to emerge into leadership. They have developed several partnering and narrative tools to support them in their decision-making.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I have revealed the findings interpreted from the collected data; these are summarized here. First, at this point in RCAP’s history, the participants’ partnering experiences are more focused within the community, rather than between them and the university. Second, the partnering relationships create a matrix of shifting complexities and ambiguities which are unlimited in their possible resources and challenges. Third, there were four primary narrative threads that resonated through the participants’ experiences: Creating Community, Building Consensus, Establishing Boundaries and Expectations, and Sustaining the Partnership. These threads were braided within the participants’ public narratives of Self/Us/Now. In the final chapter, I will discuss the study conclusions and their implications for Rural County, Research University, and the discipline of higher education community-engaged scholarship.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The inquiry purpose of this study was to explore and describe partnering experiences in a CES partnership in the rural South. The practical purposes were to inform RUAP about how they might better support future developing partnerships, and to reflectively inform RCAP about their own development. The academic purpose was to fill a gap in the CES literature, which is lacking in partnering narratives and particularly lacking in studies that employ narrative inquiry methodologies.

The study was focused within a project initiated by a land-grant research university partnering with a rural community in the southeastern United States. A narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin, 2013) was modified to explore the lived and learning experiences of the community and university partners as they worked together to create and sustain a CES collective impact initiative (Kania & Kramer, 2011) in which multiple public and private entities were involved. The study was guided by a singular research question: What are the partnering experiences of rural Southern community partners and land-grant research university partners in a collective impact CES partnership?

Ganz’ (2009, 2011) public narrative concepts of Self, Us, Now provided a practical structure for the inquiry as well as a theoretical lens for understanding narrative threads (or themes) woven within the study participants’ partnering experiences. A metaphor based on Farner’s (2016) adaptive braided model was applied to the thematic
narrative data analysis to frame the complexities of experiences. This study fills a gap in the CES literature, which is lacking both in partnering experience narratives and studies that use narrative inquiry methodology.

RUAP and RCAP have worked together for more than six years, realizing small and large achievements which they have determined will contribute toward an improved quality of life in their community. The study findings and conclusions provide insights to RUAP, RCAP, and the discipline of higher education engagement, regarding the relational and partnering dynamics that both reinforce and challenge a CES partnership that is known to be successful in meeting agreed-upon goals. This closing chapter provides a summary of the findings, discussion of conclusions about partnering, and implications for theory, practice and future research in CES.

**Summary of Findings**

The first finding of the study was that the dynamics between partners in this collective impact initiative created a relational matrix that is exponentially complex in challenges and resources. While a relational matrix may seem obvious in a collective impact initiative, the literature often refers to campus-community partnerships as a two-way system, while the reality is much more complex on the ground in the community. The finding is mindful of the intricacies of collective impact initiatives and points to the necessity for an impartial backbone organization (Garber & Adams, 2017; Kania, Kramer, Turner, Merchant, & Martin, 2012) to manage the multiplicities of a relational matrix system.

Secondly, at this point in the history of RCAP, the experiences of both RUAP and RCAP partners was focused more in the community than with RUAP. The study
conclusions therefore are focused more on the experiences of community partners.

Lastly, further findings were presented as narrative threads braided within the participants’ public narratives of Self/Us/Now. The threads identified through a narrative thematic analysis of the data were: Creating Community, Embracing Diversity, Establishing Boundaries and Expectations, and Sustaining the Partnership.

In summary, the complexities of partnering relationships in a collective impact initiative situated in a rural community were emphasized in the both the university and community participants’ narratives; however, the findings were mainly centered in the community. While the university partners’ experiences are reflected in the narratives, the conclusions are concentrated more in the community’s partnering among themselves.

**Study Conclusions**

The data reflected the participants’ individual narratives within a Partnership that has formed collective narratives—narratives of Us—and which is currently considering strategic actions for sustaining the Partnership. The conclusions discussed, therefore, are relevant not only to the individual study participants, but to RCAP as a whole, and to other rural RUAP collective impact initiatives. The participants’ braided experiences within public narratives provide a context from which to draw and apply community-focused conclusions.

Four main conclusions were drawn from the study, which will be listed here, with theory and practice implications discussed below:

1. To increase the effectiveness of higher education engagement in collective impact initiatives, in which multiple community entities are involved, partners must
mediate reciprocity and power dynamics within the community as purposefully as they do between the campus and community.

2. While diversity of perspective and inclusion of all citizens are espoused values in CES, theories-in-use and practical actions in the community are constrained by normative social values that are galvanized within the place and history of the community.

3. Practices that cultivate community capacities for administering backbone organization roles are necessary for community partnership sustainability in collective impact initiatives.

4. Public narrative as a method of practice and research was informative and meaningful for strengthening partnering identities of Self, Us, and Now and motivating partners to take up strategic action.

These conclusions are examined further in the following discussion.

**Conclusion 1: To increase the effectiveness of higher education engagement in collective impact initiatives, in which multiple community entities are involved, partners must mediate reciprocity and power dynamics within the community as purposefully as they do between the campus and community.**

Again, while an emphasis on intersects of power and reciprocity in the community might seem obvious to those who work in CES, the reality is not generally addressed in the literature. The literature focuses on intersects of power and reciprocity between campus and community, generally with the assumption that campuses leverage more power in the partnership; however, this study’s authentic partnering narratives demonstrated that power and reciprocity between community
partners impacts the effectiveness of the partnership as significantly as those between campus and community.

Sandmann and Kliewer (2012) explored ways in which differences in power and needs could impact partnerships between campus and community partners, but their overarching concepts might be applied between community partners as well: “Relationships require nuanced and clearly orchestrated negotiations of power. The success of any relationship, regardless of type, is often tied to how interested parties negotiate expectations and obligations” (p. 20).

While the literature suggests that CES is comprised of a monolithic “us/them-campus/community” partnership, this study illustrated that partnering in a collective impact initiative such as RCAP was enacted within an exponentially complex matrix of relationships that are influenced over time, relational spaces, and the history and culture of place. All those relationships are subject to negotiations of power, and the extent to which those negotiations are effective impact the outcomes of the partnering.

Hoyt (2011) found that increased levels of reciprocity and shared power between campus and community pushed the stages of engagement from pseudo-engagement to stable, authentic, and sustained engagement. Conceivably, the same theory and practice could be applied within the community, among community partners; that is, as levels of reciprocity and shared power are increased among community partners, the County Partnership itself moves from pseudo to stable, to authentic to sustained. As she maintains, “human relationships, particularly those that are resilient and capable of thriving through adversity, are the most critical element for achieving sustained engagement” (p. 282). The same dynamic holds true among community partners; if their
relationships are not resilient through adversity, sustainability of the partnerships is threatened.

Himmelman (2001) recommended that equalizing power relations in partnerships requires practices of deliberative democracy within the community. He explains that, “power . . . must be guided by principles and practices of democratic governance, grassroots leadership development, and community organizing” (p. 278), which are the very practices that RUAP has championed with RCAP from the establishment of the Partnership. RUAP has offered a forum for RCAP to practice democratic governance within the Partnership; however, at some point RCAP must pick up responsibility for providing the forum for itself (see discussion of Conclusion 3 below). Ganz (2009, 2011) suggests that strong narratives of Us provide motivations for strategic action. He recommends practices of public narrative to combat barriers to action.

According to Himmelman, equitable power in the County Partnership would mean that all partners share both the responsibility and the accountability to co-create the project by resource-sharing, consensus-building, and decision-making. Likewise, Davis et al. (2017) suggested practices of civic engagement and transformative learning to mediate reciprocity and power in partnerships. All of these practices could be employed by and within the County Partnership to increase the likelihood of sustainability going forward.

**Complexities of relationships.** As expressed in the participants’ narratives, long-term relationships, history, and traditions in this small Southern community have an impact on partnering within RCAP, along with new and changing relationships and narratives moving in and out of the Partnership. Because multiple relationships in RCAP,
with overlapping histories and complexities impact the outcomes of the partnership as a whole, it is difficult to know precisely what dynamics are supporting or challenging the meeting of goals. While it may be possible to assess the impacts of those dynamics that are open and available for observation, the impacts of relational dynamics that are hidden will obviously not be known by the whole partnership.

Hidden agendas and alliances, past tensions, conflicts and wounds, covert and overt power—power defined as “the capacity to produce intended results” (Himmelman, 2001, p. 278)—were all narratives that seemed to be influencing the outcomes of the partnership. Several conflictual experiences were mentioned circuitously in both group inquiries but were not identified and addressed openly. The covert discussions could have been due to my presence and participants’ uncertainty about what could be discussed openly for research purposes, or the mentions of these conflicts could have been muted expressions of power in the group—that is, some in the group having information while others are not fully informed—but it was also possible that these experiences had never been discussed amenably by the study participants, who didn’t feel empowered to address them openly.

Since these narratives were not on the table for consideration in this inquiry—even when it seemed several partners in the room were aware of the stories—it was not possible to know if those experiences and possibly the people involved continued to have an impact on RCAP at some level. Various nuances in multiple relationships amplify the complexities of the relationships in the Partnership and amplify the impacts of the intersects of reciprocity and power on the Partnership.
Given RCAP’s reputation for being successful in achieving community-determined goals, the complexities of the relational matrix in the partnership have apparently not stood in the way of achieving those goals. I wondered, though, who may have been pushed to the side in order for goals to be obtained and at what cost to the values of a caring community.

**Building consensus.** The study participants were concerned about modeling practices of deliberative democracy and consensus in RCAP, that is, practicing reciprocal processes that allow all voices and perspectives to be considered for reaching compromises in which all can agree (Davis et al., 2017). In their experiences, the RUAP partners, especially, championed inclusive practices, reciprocity, and mutual power-sharing in decision-making and described their roles as facilitating and supporting the community partners in practicing democratic and consensus-building processes.

As several participants noted, inviting all persons impacted by a decision and crafting compromises to reach a consensus upon which most can agree is laborious, time-consuming, and tension-filled. Deliberative civic engagement takes involvement and practice from the community and requires that dissent and disagreement be voiced and not subverted. In this regard, Davis et al. (2017) noted:

In the field of community outreach and community-engaged scholarship, there has been an implied assumption that being an effective community–campus partnership means moving directly toward increasing degrees of consensus. Assuming that consensus forms in a linear fashion and will include no incidents of disagreement is problematic. Creating and protecting productive channels of disagreement can promote higher levels of interpersonal reciprocity between
individual partners who possess varied levels of power, communication skills, and learning capacities (p. 41).

The participants’ experiences contained instances of heated debates and extended deliberations, including several in which community members were insistent on pushing personal agendas, which stalemated collective progress.

When no amount of reaching out to include those who were adamant about their own agenda would persuade them to compromise, those in the community who were working toward agreed-upon goals created paths to move on without the dissenters. It seemed to me that these stories of contention pointed to a collective identity that bounded participation in RCAP decision-making within moving toward consensus. While RCAP partners were clear in their narratives of Us that they valued welcoming all community members, they were also clear that all were equally expected to participate in reaching consensus and working toward agreed-upon goals. Their shared values empowered them to take action to protect the goals of the Partnership. What the study participants did not address was what happened to the sense of caring community when “naysayers” were sidelined from the collective process.

**Conclusion 2:** While diversity of perspectives and inclusion of all citizens are espoused values in CES, theories-in-use and practical actions in the community are constrained by normative social values that are galvanized within the place and spaces, or history, of the community.

All the study participants’ experiences included stories of caring about the community, its place, its people, and its heritage in past and future. Narratives of caring seemed to be foundational to their partnering. Although the study participants’
experiences reflected a caring community through embracing diversity, or “bringing their hearts” to their partnering, there was a lack of diversity in the composition of the study participants and in the meetings, I observed, which were comprised of community leaders. In her research on community boundary-spanners, Katherine R. Adams (2013) also found a lack of racial diversity in the Allied Partnerships she studied and recommended further research to ascertain the barriers and recommend practices to open up access to participation in Allied Partnerships. She also made recommendations for RUAP to adjust the funding requirements of stakeholders in order to allow opportunities for populations without funding resources to be included, which might prove effective for widening inclusion in Allied Partnership community leadership.

**Belonging and barriers.** Touching on their narratives of diversity and inclusion were several experiences in the study that pointed to the significance of belonging in the community and how belonging, and barriers to belonging, impact partnering. For instance, Abigail told of her intentions for her family to belong to the community and how Smallville is “her heart,” even though she is not a Rural County native. Bonita’s story included being a third-generation native of the county with a family tradition and expectation of civic engagement. Her experiences highlighted creating alternatives to work toward agreed-upon goals when her values “bumped against” (Clandinin, 2013) those of county decision-makers. Frances is from a town outside of the county that is perceived in Smallville as a rival municipality. She is sensitive to her outsider status and has been careful to show respect for local knowledge in building generative reciprocity (Dostilio et al., 2012) with her educational partners in Rural County. Donnie, who is a
Rural County native, was very clear that his partnering experiences center around his desire to make a positive impact in the community to which he has always belonged.

On the flip side of belonging, there were barriers to participation in RCAP that were evident in the participants’ experiences. When I asked several of the participants who was not included in RCAP—who was not present at their meeting tables—there was an acknowledgement that ethnic and racial diversity in RCAP was not representative of the county’s population. And yet, study participants voiced the need for widening the circle of participation and bringing in “fresh” voices to support their work together.

Garber and Adams (2017) reported regarding RUAP: “In 12 community programs conducted over 10 years, the best progress occurred in communities with the largest number of active volunteers and the greatest diversity of participants” (p. 16). In the final group inquiry, I suggested that people who may feel marginalized, for whatever reason, may not necessarily feel welcomed to an open public meeting. The participants considered how they might widen the circle of RCAP and bring a broader range of perspectives to the partnership. A future practice of intentionally extending invitations for participation in RCAP projects and in their representative entities emerged from the final group inquiry.

**Considerations of diversity and inclusion.** While there was a stated valuing of diversity of perspectives in RCAP, there was little mention by the study participants of the lack of racial and ethnic diversity during the inquiry. Actualizing diversity and inclusion—or said differently, power equity and social justice—will require reflexive attention and intention to overcome the unyielding normative social values of exclusion, elitism, and patriarchy in the Deep South.
Since the partnering expectation in RCAP is toward consensus, and race and religion can be so divisive in public discourse, those who participate in RCAP may not address these concerns in order to stay focused on agreed-upon goals. Yet, the impacts of divisive issues on partnering are not known if they are not discussed openly and courageously in a community that intends to be caring and inclusive. The landscapes of divisive concerns is where the intersect of reciprocity and power can be identified, acknowledged, and mediated. The more reciprocity increases in partnering—that is, respect and valuing of all partners by all partners—the more possibilities for equitable power-sharing increases—that is, everyone sharing in capacities to produce intended and agreed-upon results, which in turn allows for increasing diversity and inclusion.

As I thought about the lack of diversity narratives in this study, I was reminded of a colleague who was a champion of inclusion (http://www.inclusion.com/). Judith Snow believed the label “disability” did not apply to individuals. In her frame of reference people were differently-abled, while communities were disabled. Communities were disabled to the extent that they did not include people within the life of the community: “not just in, but with” the community. Judith believed every person in a community has value, gifts, graces, abilities, and narratives to share with the community. Every person who is not embraced within the community represents a disability for the community as a whole, which is why inclusion is so significant.

By considering their definition of community as embracing diversity, the study participants were touching on their need to extend the circle of community to be more inclusive. Judith demonstrated time and again that people with physical, psychological, communication, and other differences were the quintessential teachers of inclusion within
a community. I wondered if it might be instructive for RCAP to consider reaching out to other-abled community members for guidance regarding inclusion.

When it comes to concerns of racial and ethnic diversity, those of us formed in the South are like the proverbial fish swimming in water, wondering where the water is. Breaking the barriers to diversity and inclusion in our partnerships will require dialogues of courage and practices of unpacking long-standing privileges that we cannot see from within our own formation and subjectivity.

Ganz (2009) stated unequivocally: “We cannot turn our love into justice without engaging power. Justice is not achieved without struggle. It’s not achieved without mobilizing power” (p. 18). Even though we are bringing our full hearts and selves to our endeavors, if CES is to be effective in shifting power and creating social change in communities and on campus, we must incorporate practices within our partnering experiences and public narratives that address diversity and inclusion—or power equity and social justice. We must act to overcome long-standing inequities in access to decision-making and capacities to produce intended results. We cannot turn our caring community into a community of diversity and inclusion without engaging power.

Conclusion 3: Practices that cultivate community capacities for administering backbone organization roles are necessary for community partnership sustainability in collective impact initiatives.

While Kania and Kramer (2011) established the necessity for backbone organizations in collective impact initiative, and Garber and Adams (2017) concluded that the Allied Partnership performs backbone organization roles, this study found that community partners were not ready to pick up responsibility for those roles after six years...
of partnering with RUAP, indicating a need for cultivating those capacities within the community. Said another way, which supports the awareness of RUAP in this regard, how can RUAP provide resources for cultivating community capacities to prepare for “graduation”? While the narratives of Us and motivations for building the partnership and achieving small and large agreed-upon goals over an extended time have been strong, it is not apparent those narratives and motivations are strong enough to sustain the partnership into the future.

At the juncture in RCAP’s timeline when this inquiry was conducted, the study participants’ experiences were centered more within the community than between the community and the university, and the Partnership was apparently stalled regarding their decision-making for sustaining the Partnership. Participants expressed concern that they did not yet have a collective vision for how to sustain RCAP without RUAP completing organizational tasks and providing leadership.

RUAP enters into partnership with a community with the clearly communicated intent to eventually graduate the community. Being an Allied Partnership Alumni Community means the community has leadership responsibility, with continued access to the University as a resource. Ginny summarized the concern that all the participants discussed: “Somehow, we have to figure out a way to continue the connection [after the University partner withdraws].” To sustain its Partnership, the community will need to develop its own internal resources and accountability, its own power within, or agency (Rowlands, 1997).

**Sustaining backbone organizational roles.** As Garber and Adams (2017) have shown, RUAP fills the role of a backbone organization for collective impact initiatives,
providing “six common activities: guiding vision and strategy, supporting aligned activities, establishing shared measures, building public will, advancing policy, and mobilizing funding” (p. 13). As the issue of sustainability was discussed throughout the study inquiry, the main concern voiced by the study participants was that RUAP has maintained its role of impartiality in community issues, which was considered essential for the viability of the Partnership.

As discussed in Chapter 5, the partners are aware they each bring their own individual agendas and issues and those of their representative entities to the table, while the convener must remain neutral (or impartial) in order to hold a collaborative space for trust to emerge among the collective impact partners. None of the study participants seemed convinced that any entity within the community could be impartial in fulfilling the role of a backbone organization, and no one ventured an idea of how they might hold each other accountable to collectively fulfill those roles, such as rotating the convening task among themselves.

Currently, RUAP is providing for the community, Research University, and the multiple collective impact partners to receive benefits that are agreeable to all parties. Although both community and campus partners know RCAP will continue with the status quo until the University must withdraw, the scenario of RCAP closing when RUAP withdraws certainly not inevitable. RCAP may yet find their way into a vision and action plan for future sustainability, the accomplishment of which would inform sustainability decisions for all other RUAP partnerships in rural communities, as well as those beyond Research University.
Ganz (2010) maintained that the motivation for social change is generated from a public narrative process: people bringing their Self interests and concerns to build an Us identity that is energized by collective reasons for making changes in the Now. Public narrative practices were employed in this inquiry and could be used in the future by RCAP to strengthen narratives of Us and motivations for strategic action.

**Building on past successes.** RCAP experienced an enormous success in deliberative civic engagement when the Partnership participated in establishing the College and Career Academy (CCA) in the County school system. A communal motivation to bolster the local economy generated an Us identity that provided the impetus to create a united plan. Several of the study participants retold their experiences in the five-year process of bringing together everyone in the County touched in some way by education, business, and industry, and hashing out compromises in many meetings and conversations that included both advocating and opposition. Consensus and compromise from all entities involved eventually led to a collective agreement to establish, build, open and maintain the CCA.

The experiences described in establishing the CCA proved RCAP public narratives to be effective for developing generative reciprocity (Dostilio et al., 2012), for fostering agency in individuals and systems (Rowlands, 1997), and for cultivating shared power that produced intended results (Himmelman, 2001). RCAP could tap its successful public narratives to once again identify and energize its collective reasons for sustaining the Partnership.

In the first group inquiry, James alluded to their possibilities for sustainability by building on past successes: “I will say that we've matured. I think we've learned a lot
about synergy . . . And eventually we want to graduate and that means we're all successful together.” On the other hand, Abigail voiced in the final group inquiry that she believed there would have to be a “catalyst situation,” like RUAP withdrawing from its backbone organization roles, before they would collectively consider their options for sustainability. The outcome is yet to be determined.

**Conclusion 4: Public narrative as a method of practice and research was informative and meaningful for strengthening partnering identities of Self, Us, and Now and motivating partners to take up strategic action.** Because narrative inquiry and CES mirror each other in relational methods, the study participants learned about themselves and their partnering through employing public narrative within the narrative inquiry process. The final group inquiry suggested public narratives were powerful for the participants to build on their experiences and to understand each other and their partnering narratives more fully.

As the study participants considered their individual reasons for joining the Partnership (Self narratives) and their experiences of building a We identity (Us narratives), they began to suggest how they might increase participation to strengthen the future of the Partnership. The participants suggested the narrative inquiry and public narrative process might provide a format for RCAP to strengthen its commitments not only for community betterment, but for community empowerment (Himmelman, 2001), in which they pick up full accountability for the Partnership.

Examining their status through theoretical lenses might provide CES partnerships language and concepts for moving forward. For example, Figure 2 depicts that developing agency (Rowlands, 1997) based on generative reciprocity (Dostilio et al.,
Within collective impact partnering would theoretically move RCAP from a transactional to a transformative partnership (Enos & Morton, 2003). If RCAP determines to collectively take up accountability for its partnering, it would theoretically move into a stage of sustained engagement (Hoyt, 2011). Sustained engagement would mean RCAP is empowered to be accountable for their own sustainability and contributions to the community, and they could invite all the various resources accessible to them to assist, including Research University if needed.

Sustaining RCAP would mean developing collective empowerment within partnering, in which all community members have access to decision-making and capacities to produce intended results (Himmelman, 2001). Further, as mentioned above, the application of narrative inquiry and public narrative processes to support collective empowerment in CES practices might prove helpful for framing RCAP’s decision-making discussions for the future.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The recommendations for future inquiry focus on: (a) establishing boundaries and expectations, (b) expanding study participants and types of CES partnerships, (c) diversity and inclusion, (d) outcomes of practices of narrative inquiry and public narrative, and (e) deeper analysis of the intersects of power and reciprocity and their impacts on types of partnerships and stages of engagement. Discussion regarding these recommendations are presented in the following section.

**Establishing Boundaries and Expectations**

It seemed from our discussions that the participants were satisfied that they made attempts to include those who were not focused on agreed-upon goals, and that they felt
the boundaries and expectations for RCAP were strengthened when they did not allow dissenters to sidetrack progress. At the same time, it appeared as if the complexities of partnering relationships were simplified and opportunities for deeper learning and partnering experiences were missed when those who refused to compromise were dropped from discussions. Learning with those who passionately championed their personal agendas to the detriment of consensus might inform future partnering practices for extending RCAP participation. Future research that explores understanding the narratives of Self for those in the community who were not willing to work toward consensus would be an informative inquiry for the Partnership.

**Expanding Study Participants and Types of CES Partnerships**

Due to time and design limitations, the university partners included in the study were confined to the RUAP Operations Coordinator and the Allied Professional, therefore the narratives included from university partners were narrow in scope. Future research that includes faculty, students, and administrators who engaged with the community partners would provide more insight into community-campus partnering.

Similarly, this study was confined to one type of CES partnership, that of a collective impact initiative between a research university and a rural Southern community. Future research that expands the types of partnerships, the types of higher education institutions, the timeline of the Partnership—whether new or matured—and the location of the community would reveal expanded experiences and insights into CES partnering. Also, a longitudinal case study to consider how partnering changes over the life of a CES partnership would be significant.
Diversity and Inclusion

It was difficult to gage the actual diversity and inclusiveness of RCAP in this limited study, thus, more research is needed to investigate the extent and impacts of diversity and inclusion on RCAP partnering, and on RUAP communities as a whole. Particularly noted in this study and Adams’ (2013) study was a lack of racial diversity in Partnership leadership. Further inquiry is needed to identify barriers to diversity and inclusion and recommend practices to open up access to Allied Partnership participation. Also, implementation of recommendations made by Adams regarding developing alternatives for funding entities’ inclusion in the Executive Committee is needed, with assessment of their impacts on increasing racial and ethnic diversity in RUAP partnerships.

Future research is needed to explore partnering experiences in RCAP regarding race and religion, since these social concerns were not mentioned by the participants in this study. Donnie recounted an experience regarding Hispanic ethnicity and the barriers that language create for parents to participate in school events; otherwise, there were no experiences shared by the participants in the study regarding race or religion—either positive or negative in nature—which is remarkable given the pervasiveness of these social issues in the Deep South. There was also no mention by this study’s participants of other marginalized populations—for example, those with physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, citizens who are aging, youth, LGBT citizens, and citizens who are homeless.
Outcomes of Practices of Narrative Inquiry and Public Narrative

While this study’s participants were laudatory about their experiences in the narrative inquiry process, there was no follow-up to assess the impacts and outcomes of the study. It cannot be said whether the public narrative process actually strengthened RCAP’s narratives of Us and motivated the partners to act. Further research is needed to learn the true efficacy of these practices.

Deeper Analysis of the Intersects of Power and Reciprocity

Further research is needed to focus on the intersects of power and reciprocity and their impacts on types of partnerships and stages of engagement, especially within and among community partners. While previous research has focused on power and reciprocity between campus and community partners, little is mentioned in the literature about best practices for mediating power and reciprocity among community partners. It cannot be said if practices of civic engagement and transformative learning (Davis et al., 2017), or practices of narrative inquiry and public narrative, as applied in this study, are effective for increasing reciprocity and shifting power inequities within communities; these theoretical concepts need to be confirmed empirically.

Conclusion of the Study

The partnering experiences and public narratives shared in this study were only a small and brief segment of much larger and complex partnering experiences in the collective impact initiative. Further, the narrative analysis was limited by my own narratives and through understanding of the CES literatures that framed my inquiry. In the end, there are many perspectives yet to be revealed about CES partnering.
Because narrative inquiry deals in lived experiences, I was continuously reminded that there are real people with real lives in real communities behind the pseudonyms in the written representation of the research. I often wondered about the continuing complexities of their partnering experiences that cannot be captured in a brief text.

The study participants defined community as embracing diversity and bringing their hearts to the Partnership. I applaud their willingness to share their experiences with me in openness and honesty. They each engaged in courageous interviews, taking risks to share their partnering narratives with me, and more importantly with each other. I offer their narratives as possibilities, in the hope that their experiences might provide insights into what it means to partner successfully in collective impact CES between a research university and a small, rural community in the southeastern United States.

Epilogue

Stories R Us. Walk into the warehouses of our lives and look on the shelves. There you will find the stories that define who we are and drive our living; stories we have lived, told, relived and retold. Throughout our living, we pull our stories off the shelves of our lives and we tell them again and again. We tell the stories we have lived, and we live the stories we tell through the meanings they hold for us. This dissertation is a story that holds several primary meanings. Partnering among higher education and community partners, applying a narrative inquiry methodology in engaged-scholarship research, my own experiences crossing bridges between universities and communities, and my lifelong dream to learn through doctoral studies are all bound up in this telling.

In human science research, we say that all our research is, in some form or fashion, “me-search.” We bring our own stories into our research, and we inquire into
stories that intrigue us, and about which there is more for us to learn. I have long been interested in the meanings of belonging in communities and the ways in which we join together in communities to accomplish common goals, especially when our values, beliefs, traditions and customs are diverse. These curiosities, along with passions for lifelong learning, higher education, spiritual connectedness, and story-telling have driven this dissertation. My hope in the telling is that the meanings that emerged might be useful for others who have interests similar to mine.

This story, as for all life stories, is not finished; rather, it is on-going and still being written in all its many facets. This page from the story of a sustained higher education community-engagement partnership in the rural South does not presume to tell the partnership’s whole story but looks a little more closely at what it means to partner in that context. Maybe from the retelling we might have learned at least a little more about what partnering means in this noteworthy community, where people are joining together to accomplish their common goals and to be community by bringing their hearts.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

First Group Inquiry Agenda

AGENDA

2:00PM  Appreciation
        Brief Self Introduction

        Review of Informed Consent
        Sign Consent Forms

2:15PM  Introductory Round
        Ice-Breaker: Game or sport from childhood or youth

2:30PM  First Round – Self
        Metaphor – Office equipment or supply
        What was happening with you when you joined up with RCAP?
        What were your concerns?
        What connected you with this group and brought you to this endeavor?”

        Post on flip chart marked “Self”

2:45PM  Second Round – Us
        Metaphor – Weather
        Describe an experience in the RCAP that was important to you by
        metaphorically depicting the weather at the time

        Post on flip chart marked “Us”

3:00PM  Third Round – Now
        Vision for future – Graphic or Words
        Not doing, but being

        Post on flip chart marked “Now”

3:30PM  Break

3:45PM  Final Round – Summarize
        What was significant in today’s discussion
        Write down and place in box
        Open discussion
APPENDIX B

Email Invitation to Community Partners

Katherine L. Davis, PhD Student
Leading, Learning and Organization Development
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy
College of Education, University of Georgia

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study regarding the Research University Allied Partnership

Dear [Potential Participant],

I am a PhD student in the Leading, Learning and Organization Development Program in the College of Education at the Research University. I am contacting you upon referral from [Name], Research University Allied Partnership (RUAP), to invite your participation in a research study about the [Name of Community] Allied Partnership. The purpose of this study is to understand and describe how successful, sustained-engagement Allied Community partnerships are built. If we holistically and descriptively re-tell the stories of successful community-university partnerships, it may assist us with replication, development, and success of future sustained-engagement. I have purposefully invited you to participate because of your depth and breadth of knowledge in the [Name of Community] Allied Partnership.

Your participation in this study will include: one 60 to 90-minute individual interview, with a possibility of one or two follow-up phone interviews; a 90-minute group interview with other [Name of Community] Allied Partnership leaders; and, my observation of Executive Committee and/or IWG meetings. All interviews and observations will be video or audio-recorded, with the permission of all participants. All information disclosed for the purposes of the study will be confidential; information will be compiled, and individual identities will be concealed.

I am attaching a formal Participant Consent Form, which is required by Research University Institutional Review Board. The Consent Form provides further information about confidentiality, and a brief description of the study including background, purpose and methodology, potential benefits, and timeline. If you choose to participate in the study, please sign, scan, and return the Consent Form to me in an email reply, and I will contact you regarding scheduling interview and observation times.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about participating. This research study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Aliki Nicolaides, a professor in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy, College of Education. Professor Nicolaides can be reached at alikin@---.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Katherine L. Davis (“Katie”)
University of Georgia
kldavis@---.edu
404-226-5129
APPENDIX C

Brief Description of Study

Background

College and university staff, faculty, students and administrators in the U.S. and around the world are recognizing that the tri-fold mission of higher education – that of learning, discovery, and outreach – cannot be fully realized in a vacuum on campus. The 20th century roles of the academic “ivory tower” and the “scholarly expert” are being challenged in the 21st century. Higher education institutions in the U.S. have been responding to a call since the 1990’s to “return to our roots” (Kellogg Commission, 2001) by engaging with the communities from which higher education emerged and with whom higher education is committed to serve.

Reciprocal Partnering

Concerns regarding trust, cooperation, collaboration, mutual benefit, reciprocity, and power-sharing are inherent in creating partnerships between social entities with clear boundaries yet unequal resources (Sandmann & Kliwer, 2012) – as is often the case between communities and universities. However, much like a river running through a forest or plain, universities and the communities they serve are interconnected in a complex, multi-layered social “ecosystem” (Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). To be successful, partnering between these multi-layered, interconnected entities will require transformations in the systems and relationships that have been entrenched in their 20th century ideologies and traditions. The isolated, insular “ivory towers” and “traditional communities” of yesterday will not thrive in the globalized 21st century. The educational, social, health, environmental, and economic demands on the human ecosystems of today will require communities and universities to be transformed as they work together to address their common concerns.

Research University Allied Partnership

The Allied Partnership was created to support Research University in answering the call for new ways of engaging with the communities of the state to understand and address common educational, social, health, environmental, and economic challenges. The Allied Partnership serves as a portal for communities to access the resources of RU and other higher education institutions in State, and for RU to access the wealth of knowledge and opportunities for learning, discovery, and outreach that reside in State’s communities. University staff, administrators, faculty and students are coming alongside State’s community leaders and citizens, governments, businesses and non-profit organizations in mutually beneficial and reciprocal partnerships (Carnegie Foundation, n.d.) that are fostered by the RU Allied Partnership. Together they are tackling the complex social challenges that could not be adequately addressed by any one entity alone.

Allied Communities

The Allied Partnership has been highly successful in supporting the creation of effective, mutually beneficial, reciprocal partnering between communities and RU, and with other colleges and universities in the state as well. Building a platform that can support the various stakeholders as they navigate the dynamics of shifting social ecosystems is a formidable accomplishment – one that evolves with rough seas, and with tough sailors who stay the course from within communities and the University. Those communities that have been successful in their navigation are recognized as “RU Allied Communities.”
Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this research is to describe and understand experiences of partnering in a successful, sustained-engagement RU Allied Community, particularly navigating the daunting relational challenges of developing trust, cooperation, collaboration, mutual benefit, reciprocity, and power-sharing between and among community and university partners and stakeholders. If experiences of successful community-university partnering can be told more fully, hearing those narratives may assist with the replication, development, and success of future community-engagement scholarship projects.

Method of Research
Because the relational partnering experiences of the RU Allied Partnership comprise a narrative that now guides the Allied Partnership staff and Allied Community partners in their engagement and collaboration, this study will use a narrative inquiry approach for understanding more fully their experiences of partnering. As the researcher, I propose to come alongside a successful Allied Community to hear stories of partnering. What are the stories of “self, us, and now” (Ganz, 2009) that the partners have lived by in the project’s creation, development, and sustainability? As their stories are retold and relived, it is anticipated that new stories to live by and new understandings will emerge, new actions will be taken, and the on-going narrative of the Allied Community will be highlighted.

Researcher Subjectivity
As a doctoral student, my own partnering experiences during my 40-year career in the field of mental health will also influence the study. How I frame the study, the questions I ask and don’t ask, what I observe and miss, and how I understand and interpret the participants’ stories, will all be flavored by my own narratives. In essence, because my own narratives will be present in my research, the study participants and I will co-create the stories of partnering in an Allied Community partnership, and we will all be involved in ensuring the trustworthiness of the narratives we create about their Allied Community.

Benefits
The benefits of this study are located within the multiple layers of the Allied Partnership:

- The Allied Community partners may benefit from retelling their partnering stories of the creation, development, and sustainability of their project’s partnership. In highlighting the experiences of navigating their social ecosystem, they may discover strengths and challenges they had not previously realized, which will serve them as they continue to build their sustainability.
- The RU Allied Partnership may benefit from a more holistic description of the narratives of partnering. Further, the University’s platform will be intentionally supporting an understanding of partnering that is necessary for future success.
- I, as the researcher, will benefit from learning with successful leaders, and I will have an opportunity to contribute to future Allied Communities. And, not insignificantly, I will have an opportunity to complete the requirements for my doctoral degree.

Timeline
During the first quarter of 2017, I plan to meet with stakeholders in a successful and Allied Community to hear stories of their partnering experiences, listen and observe as they work together, review their documents and history, and gather their individual and collective partnering narratives. I will then search for understandings of reciprocal partnering through the stories that we co-create, and check with the participants regarding clarity and trustworthiness.
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

RESEARCH UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM
EXPERIENCES OF PARTNERING IN SUSTAINED COMMUNITY-ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP

Researcher’s Statement
I am asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study, so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Aliki Nicolaides
Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy
alikin@---.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this research is to explore and describe experiences of partnering in a successful RU Allied Community. If we re-tell the stories of successful community-university partners more fully, it may assist us with replication, and the development and success of future community-engaged scholarship.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...
- Participate in a 2-hour facilitated discussion with other Rural County Allied Partnership leaders, followed by a 60 to 90-minute individual, face-to-face interview, with a possibility of one or two follow-up phone interviews.
- It is anticipated the group discussion and interviews will occur between April and June 2017. The total amount of time expected for your participation is approximately four to five hours.
- You will be asked to describe your partnering experiences in the Rural County Allied Partnership. For example: Tell me your story about joining the Partnership. Describe a time when the Partnership was working well; what was that experience like for you; what did you do? Describe a time when the Partnership was really challenged; what was that experience like for you; what did you do?
• Your participation in the study is voluntary; you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty.
• The researcher will attend and observe Executive Committee and/or IWG meetings and review Rural County Allied Partnership documents, meeting notes, flyers, brochures, newspaper articles, website information, and other materials that tell the story of the Partnership.
• Interviews and the group discussion will be audio or video-recorded. Transcripts and recordings will be secured and then destroyed by the researcher after the completion of the study.

Risks and discomforts
• There are minimal risks or discomforts associated with this research. Risks include the potential for some emotional discomfort or stress when sharing your experiences, particularly since the study is interested in the challenges as well as the successes of the Partnership. Those risks will be minimized by establishment of support in a safe environment by the researcher and participant for honest sharing of partnering experiences.

Benefits
The Rural County Allied Partnership
• Individual stories about partnering experiences told, heard, and acknowledged
• Group discussion and sharing of partnering experiences
• Communicate the success of the Community Partnership to a larger audience
RU Allied Partnership
• Intentional support of a focus on partnering necessary for future success
• Communicate the success of the RU Allied Partnership to a larger audience
Researcher
• Learning with successful community-university partnership leaders
• Support of the Allied Partnership and Community
• Access for conducting research

Audio/Video Recording
Audio or video recording will be used during the individual interviews and group discussion. Capturing audio or video images will assist the researcher in more fully understanding and describing the partnering experiences of the participants. Recordings and transcripts will be secured and destroyed by the researcher after the completion of the study.

Privacy/Confidentiality
All observations and information disclosed for the purposes of the study will be confidential. The results of the research study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used without explicit permission for such use. The
Taking part is voluntary
Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept and may continue to be analyzed as part of the study.

If you have questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Katherine L. Davis, a doctoral candidate at the Research University. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Aliki Nicolaides, at alikin@---.edu or at 706-583-8098. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@---.edu.

Research Subject’s Consent to Participate in Research:
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

____________________________    ______________________  ____________
Name of Researcher    Signature   Date

____________________________    _____________________  ____________
Name of Participant    Signature   Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.
APPENDIX E

Individual Interview Protocols

Before we begin our interview, I need to take a few minutes to review and record several reminders for both of us. It is all right for me to turn on the recorder now? (Recorder on for the remainder of the interview):

Thank you for being willing to share your time and your experiences for this study. As you know, I am interested in learning about your partnering experiences in the [Name of County] Allied Partnership. I am particularly curious about your partnering experiences during smooth times and challenging times in the Partnership.

I will be asking you about your experiences and recording our interview. I want to remind you that your participation is completely voluntary, and you can stop or not answer a question at any time. Also, your responses are confidential. When I report the study findings, any responses that are quoted will be identified using a pseudonym, and your name or other personal identifiers will be removed. The participants in this study will be identified only as community or university partners representing various community and university stakeholders, such as “a community business partner,” or “a local school district partner,” or “a community college partner,” not by their positions or titles within those entities.

Since this study is ultimately about partnering experiences within communities, and between communities and higher education institutions, distinctions among community partners and between community partners and higher education partners will be made.

There is a risk that you could find the interview between us to be uncomfortable at times, since I am curious not only about the positive highlights, but also the challenges of partnering. You may choose not to respond to any question by telling me you would prefer not to answer. My intention is not to assess or evaluate, but only to explore and understand partnering experiences. Of course, the more you are willing to share from your own personal experiences, the more helpful your information will be to the study.

A few more notes for us to review: There is no compensation from participation in this study, but there may be some benefit in telling your stories about your participation in the [Name of County] Allied Partnership. I will make a written transcript of our interview, and you can request a copy, if you like. All audio or video recordings and written transcripts will be secured, and once the study is completed, they will be destroyed.

As I begin to learn with all of the participants, I will create a draft of my understandings. You will be invited, if you choose, to provide feedback regarding my preliminary interpretations of the study’s findings.
Is this okay with you? Here is a copy of the information I just reviewed. Do you have any questions about the process and your participation? Good. So, remembering again that your responses will be held in confidence by me, let’s continue this journey together.

**Interview Questions**

1. Tell me the story about when and how you joined the [Name of County] Allied Partnership?
2. As you think about your own experiences in the [Name of County] Allied Partnership, what was an experience that describes the Partnership working well together? Who was involved and what was happening?
3. Again, thinking about your own experiences in the [Name of County] Allied Partnership, what was an experience that describes the Partnership in tension or conflict? Who was involved and what was happening?
4. What other experiences do you recall that might help me understand partnering experiences in the [Name of County] Allied Partnership?
5. How has the Partnership changed over time, if at all? What was that change like for you?
6. If at all, in what ways might you have changed due to your experiences in the Partnership?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your experiences in the Partnership?

**Potential Probing Questions**

2. You mentioned “ABC” happening. Would you say more about that?
3. You mentioned “DEF” happening. What was that like for you?
4. Is there a metaphor that might describe this experience?

**Wrap-Up**

1. May I call you in the future if I have questions to help me further understand your experiences?
   a. If so, what is the best number to reach you?
   b. What are the most convenient days/times to call you?
2. Thank you again for taking time to share your experiences with me. If you have further questions for me or think of something else you would like to share with me about the Partnership, here is my contact information. Please feel free to reach out to me.
APPENDIX F

Final Group Inquiry Agenda

AGENDA

10AM – 10:15
Arrival, gathering, coffee; introductions (in case there are folks not yet familiar with each other)
[This collective meaning-making will also be incorporated into the study, so I will be recording our session.]

10:15 – 10:25
Some thoughts about sharing our stories

10:25 – 10:45
Review of summary narratives from each of seven interviews.

10:45 – 11:00
First impressions of narratives.
What meanings do we make from the summary narratives?

11:00 – 11:15
Break

11:15 – 11:45
Facilitated discussion
What can be learned collectively from the various summary narratives?
How, if at all, does sharing your experiences of partnering contribute to sustaining community partnerships?
Other ideas, thoughts, comments, suggestions for future partnering?

11:45 – 12:00 – Summary Take-aways, Closing – with gratitude!
APPENDIX G

Individual Interview Narrative Profiles

Summary narrative: Abigail’s narrative is based in an experience of belonging that develops by intending to belong, by respecting the community and its people, by making oneself available to the community, and by acting on the community’s behalf – whether one grew up here or not. [From literature: definition of reciprocity – respect and valuing of what all partners bring to the table]

Participant 1 (Pseudonym Abigail) moved to Smallville over 25 years ago with her husband and children. Her husband is a well-known professional in the community, but she feels like they “belong” to Smallville, and Smallville “belongs” to them. “We became part of the community. Even though we are not native, people treat us like we’re native.” Interestingly, not being a native from this small, Southern town meant Abigail did not have the “insider/outsider” narrative that most folks from small towns have. (Researcher disclosure: I am from a small Southern town with family located there before the Civil War; so, I identify deeply with this narrative.)

Abigail and her family respect the local people and have made themselves part of them. It’s like she doesn’t know she’s “not from these parts.” Smallville is her town, and Rural is her County. “It’s my heart.” She has moved from “Self” to “Us” into “Now” in her partnering for social action in the RCAP.

Self – Relationship-building:
Abigail contends that partnering means bringing diverse voices together to gain a wider perspective for everyone. She had to live what she believes when she was advised to meet with a local politician who has what seems to be a diametrically opposed political ideology from Abigail’s. Abigail learned the stereotype she held did not fit the politician. In fact, Abigail has many concerns in common with this State Representative, with whom she now partners closely on several issues.

Abigail had been involved in leadership in the County before Allied arrived, but she picked up leadership in RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership) as well. Since the Partnership focuses on what the citizens decide are imperative concerns, Abigail joined with a group of women to focus particularly on Women’s Issues. The first concern they addressed was teen pregnancy, and they partnered with the school system, the healthcare system, and a state-wide program, among other partners, to establish a healthy relationship/human sexuality curriculum in the public schools. They met some opposition and had to create a work-around so they could keep moving forward, but they have been successful. According to anecdotal report by the school [cf P4], the teen pregnancy rate has dropped.

Us – Motivation:
Abigail’s story is one of making partnering connections, even though connections are not always possible. She is committed to bringing varied perspectives to the decision-making table in Smallville, and further, to representing her town’s concerns in wider contexts. She recognizes, from her experiences, the importance of setting aside one’s stereotypes and listen with the intention to understand another’s perspectives. “It’s how I learn; it’s how I grow as a
person, to see different sides of a story, whatever it is.” Through her experiences with RCAP, she now recognizes the importance of making connections in order to “be a community,” rather than operating as isolated entities.

Yet, her experiences also include “not partnering” when other citizens make it clear they are interested only in pushing their own agenda, and they refuse to join in a “we” identity and work toward consensus. She was also unsure about reaching out to Hispanic populations in the County; attempts to do so by others have not been successful, but she did not have data, or any experiences in that capacity.

**Now – Strategic Action:**

Through her work in RCAP, and in the light of recent national politics, Abigail has become aware of the need for more women to step into positions of leadership in local, state, and federal governing. She has made herself available to represent Smallville and Rural County in wider forums, so that their voices are heard by decision-makers beyond the city and county levels. “This is home, and I fight for rural State when I go.” Shifting power so that rural communities are considered in policy-making is on Abigail’s action agenda in representation of her community.

**Summary narrative: Bonita’s narrative is based in partnering from the center as a concerned native of the County, and from the margin when her values and concerns “bumped against” those who are decision-makers in the County.**

Participant 2 (Pseudonym Bonita) was born and raised in Smallville. Her history as a native of the county is an important part of her narrative. She has personal lifetime relationships with others in the community who are involved with the RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership). “We grew up together.” She has been involved in the community in a variety of leadership positions, but her central focus in the RCAP is on environmental concerns and projects that preserve the unique history and landscape of the county. Because it is her personal interest, she possesses extensive knowledge about the county’s environment and history about which others are not familiar. She brings perspective and knowledge that are unique. Her movement from “Self” to “Us” has been challenged by others who have decision-making power in the community, but she has been able to find alternate paths to “Us” and motivation to action in “Now.” She is now working in a sustained project that was generated from RCAP reciprocity (defined as valuing and respecting the diversity of people and ideas in the community).

**Self – Relationship-building:**

Bonita retells of being in opposition to a county-wide project that has brought much tension and “bumping against” (Clandinin, 2013) among various entities and citizens in the county for several decades. Her concerns were primarily ecological and economic, and she supported litigation to stop the project. Those who opposed lost the lawsuit and the project is moving forward; however, her opposition put her “front and center” in the county in ways she had not intended. Her “story” – as told by others – became one of being “against” the county’s prime project, and thus, there was a narrative created that she was “in opposition” to those who were supporting the project, and who also had decision-making power in the County.
Bonita was intentional in her response to the narrative, which initially emerged due to her concerns for the environment and economy. She determined to be in support of other projects in the county, rather than be in opposition to one, so she turned her focus to champion other environmental, historical, and outdoor recreational projects. She found, however, that the “opposition” narrative had followed her into her support of other projects. For example, when she proposed a project to the County Commissioners, the question was raised by one Commissioner, “But weren’t you part of the law suit against us?” She realized the current project was not being considered due to the past narrative.

Noting that the projects were important, but her leadership was a hindrance at this point, Bonita created a partnership “from the margin” within the RCAP. In order to create a work-around for gaining the support of the County Commissioners for the outdoor recreational and eco-friendly projects she was proposing, she partnered with the Allied Professional to become the voice to present the projects to the Commissioners. Bonita is not concerned about “credit” for the projects, she is concerned about the projects moving forward, and she is very willing to work from the margins and in the background, if necessary, to make them happen.

Us – Motivation:

Bonita’s story is one of partnering paradoxically, both from the center as a county native with personal history and familiarity with others, and from the margin as one who has been side-lined by power-holding decision-makers. She has been creative in using her familiarity with the county’s environment, history, and people to be able to build a work-around and continue to create a “we” identity from the margin. Her sense of “Us” and the collective concern for the environment and ecology in the County is motivation for her to take action now in projects that are continuing.

Now – Strategic Action:

Bonita has taken strategic steps to implement environmental projects, partnering with several entities in the County to move those projects forward. Shifting power into equitable and reciprocal power-sharing among all concerned voices has been a significant action in Bonita’s partnering narrative.

Summary narrative: Christy’s narrative builds on her partnering experiences with a previous community and understanding the significance of her role as convener and coach when she joined RCAP as the Allied Professional, and now as RCAP considers sustainability.

Participant 3 (Pseudonym Christy) is the second RU Allied Professional to partner with the RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership). She joined RCAP when it “was a little more mature” [that is], most of the stakeholders had already developed some good skills in working with each other.” She has built relationships from her “Self” perspective as a community developer, joined with RCAP as an “Us,” and is considering strategic action for the “Now.” As RCAP asks and answers “How will we, as a community, sustain initiatives and partnerships that exist currently?” Christy will have worked herself out of partnering with the Partnership. Others from within the community will then fulfill the roles of convener(s) and coach(es) for the community.
**Self – Relationship-building:**

Christy understands the role of the RU Allied Partnership is that of a “backbone organization” (Garber & Adams, 2017). “We’re here to build partnerships in the community . . . helping them build relationships . . . being facilitated is a skill.” To accomplish this process she states, “You just gotta have the personal plug in.” RCAP received positive feedback from the previous community with which Christy worked. She was “known” by a positive reputation as a competent professional with “a good grasp on community dynamics . . . I think that gave them some comfort that I wasn’t brand new at this . . . and that made a good fit.”

Christy experienced “bumping against” (Clandinin, 2013) miscommunication in her first year, when an action she took had unintended consequences with a community partner with whom she did not have a personal connection, and she couldn’t find a way to mend that fence. Christy was intending to support a project, and the partner misunderstood Christy’s intention. She states, “It’s very strained. I don’t really know how to fix it.” In retrospect, Christy retells learning the power of making a personal connection through a phone call, versus trying to respond to a miscommunication from a distance through email. “It got away from me . . . and I couldn’t right the ship.” Her experience was to recognize her own misstep, let go of the project, let the situation be what it is, and move on with other projects in which she had built strong, positive relationships.

**Us – Motivation:**

Christy sees her role as supporting community partners as they bring their “Self” motivations and move to “Us” motivations. “A huge legacy for Allied is teaching community members how to be facilitated, how to listen, how to take something away from a process, how to dig in beyond some surface issues, and that’s hard. It’s hard to teach people to do that because everybody has their own motive . . . how do we move from a bunch of ‘me’s’ around the table to a ‘we.’”

Christy retells the story in another community in which the community approached the RU Allied Partnership saying, “We want to do this. Can you help us?” She contrasts this proactive community to other communities that need support determining what they need as an “Us” before University resources can be brought to support them. When the community is clear about needs, RU Allied Partnership brings faculty and student partners to assist the community, while the community provides hands-on learning experiences for the students, and research opportunities for faculty and doctoral candidates. Providing logistical guidance and coaching for effective partnering between faculty, students, and community partners has been Christy’s experience in partnering with RCAP. Her partnering with RCAP has supported the entire enterprise to morph into an “Us” that motivates all involved to contribute to the greater good of the community.

An example of the “Us” providing motivation that pushes the community into strategic action is the school system serving everyone in the county, thus, all entities come together to support the school system and determine resources they can bring to provide quality education for their children – all of their children. Christy retells an experience of “trust and openness and knowing that people are in it for the greater good, not for their own good or for their own side or their organization” that emerged around a project supporting the school system.
Now – Strategic Action:  
Christy focuses on coaching community partners to discover resources among entities within the community, to reach out beyond the County for helpful resources, and “to advocate for themselves” by telling RCAP’s success stories and partnering with other communities for mutually beneficial resources. She is aware of RCAP beginning to consider strategic action steps for sustainability of RCAP through assuming responsibility for the backbone organization roles that RU Allied Partnership has been fulfilling, and how she might begin to move out of the Partnership and allow it to sustain itself.

Summary narrative: Donnie’s narrative emerges through believing that one’s interest, concern, caring, and unique skills, and removing barriers for others to make connections, can make an impact in one’s community.

Participant 4 (Pseudonym Donnie) grew up in Smallville and played high school football in the team’s undefeated season, losing to FarSouth in the State Championship game. He says the experience of crushing defeat as a teenager allowed him to learn later that there are more important things in life than losing a football championship in a “Friday Night Lights” kind of town.

Donnie’s experience in industry and being laid off in a company down-sizing opened the door for him to become a public-school teacher. Realizing he had a lot to learn about being an educator, he returned to school and earned his bachelor, master, and specialist degrees. He currently serves as the Director of the Smallville High School College and Career Academy (CCA). The CCA is a banner accomplishment for the County and RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership). The school system is also in the process of applying to be one of 30 communities nationwide designated as a Ford Foundation Next Generation Learning Community, building on their accomplishments through RCAP. Donnie has moved from “Self” to “Us,” and is considering ways he can impact the “Now” through RCAP.

Self – Relationship-building:
For Donnie, Rural County is “home” and he is committed to his community. The thread running through his narrative is his confidence that he can have a positive impact. “I see myself as being able to make a difference in what goes on around me.” And, further, that his narrative includes being uniquely positioned to do so: “I’ve seen it from all sides. I think that’s why I can see the value in this whole thing.” Due to his work in industry and education, and his leadership in county and city positions, he has perspectives from all these various entities. Donnie brings his varied background to contribute to the community good.

Donnie’s partnering is enacted through his concern for the well-being of his students, and is built on his past leadership experiences in municipal, county school board, and industrial arenas. His self-confidence is also tempered with a measure of humility: “Anybody with a good level head could have done the same thing,” he says of garnering 68% of the vote in his first school board primary race.
Us – Motivation:

Being concerned and staying abreast of his community is what led Donnie to be involved in the RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership) Education, Industry, and Business IWG that eventually generated the College and Career Academy. Of RCAP he states: “I see the Partnership as a guiding force with the County and within our whole society here.”

Donnie tells the story of an “outsider” who tried to discredit the RCAP during a community-wide meeting. In that moment of people “bumping against” each other (Clandinin, 2013), Donnie retells his personal experience: “It was beautiful to see the different people from the different areas of the partnership stand up and shoot him down” by responding that it may not be best for his business in particular, but it is good for the county overall. A clear “we” identity had been generated in the community, which was motivating them to action. The intention expressed by the group was to include everyone – invitations went out for open participation. At the same time, participation was expected to be generative, even when critical, rather than disparaging, or as Donnie called it, “naysaying.”

At the same time, Donnie recognizes this particular businessman “doesn’t understand our community; other than his business, he’s not part of our community.” As Donnie retold the story, he considered how he might be able to reach out to this businessman and find ways for him to be more engaged with the CCA and thus the community. Donnie is seeking strategic actions to remove barriers to participation in the community.

Now – Strategic Action:

Here is another example of Donnie seeking to remove barriers: When asked regarding who is not included in the RCAP, he mentioned Hispanic populations and retold the experience of several students who had excelled in school programs, yet their parents refused to participate in events celebrating the students’ achievements. As he retold the story of one student, he recalled her mentioning that her parents didn’t attend the ceremony because of their embarrassment and isolation due to not speaking English fluently. He was reminded how easy it would be to have translators at every school event, thus removing the barrier felt by these parents. In his retelling of the story, he reminded himself of a simple solution to remove a barrier for inclusion and widen the partnering in the community.

Similar to reaching out to a “naysaying” businessman in the community, Donnie noted the need to implement strategic actions to remove the experience of barriers for populations in the community who are not yet participating in community-wide events, or in RCAP information-sharing, resourcing, and decision-making.

Summary narrative: Evelyn’s narrative is one of guiding citizens by modeling partnering in democratic discourse that takes into account all voices for consensus building. She recognizes that not everyone will “play well together” and she brings together those who are willing to learn power-sharing and decision-making from within a democratic “we” identity.

Participant 5 (Pseudonym Evelyn) is the first RU Allied Professional (AP) to partner with RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership), and is now the Operations Coordinator who serves as the portal to match University resources to meet community needs. Among her first actions as AP was to bring approximately 70 members to the Education, Industry and Business IWG (IWG),
which was one of the groups identified by the initial community-listening session facilitated by the RU Allied Partnership.

Even though the community is small (about 9500 population), Evelyn realized several of the key leaders in the County did not know each other. Evelyn was intentional to ensure the invitations issued to the community represented a wide range of entities to support democratic dialogue and decision-making “to build this integrated network of educators and workforce.” Thus, a democratic discourse model was set for developing other IWGs in RCAP. RCAP partners have experienced that the involvement of all stakeholders in the community is needed for effective community development, and they have begun to pick up responsibility to network their resources with each other.

Self – Relationship-building:
Evelyn has a high level of self-awareness and extensive community relationship-building experience. She understands the way to build trust and cooperation is to act with genuine caring about the well-being of people and their communities. She quickly joined the RCAP community by meeting and caring about its citizens, and modeled building an identity of “we” by leading RCAP in small victories in which they could learn about each other’s resources and needs, have opportunities to care about each other, and learn to trust each other.

Evelyn states: “For me, that’s the value of bringing all those people together . . . they get to meet each other. They build trust over time. They see where they can leverage their resources. It adds value to what they do in their work every day, and ultimately raises up the community.” Developing a “we” identity gave RCAP the motivation to take on larger, long-term endeavors they identified for the greater good.

Us – Motivation:
The Education, Industry and Business IWG began to discover among themselves the resources they possessed in the community. They partnered with various community entities, drew from resources outside of the community, and overcame extensive barriers to generate a new educational enterprise for the future good of the community. Evelyn reports their capacity to overcome severe blocks in the process proved RCAP’s “enthusiasm and commitment to get it done. . . every partner at that table was super-motivated to make sure that goal was achieved, and they did. They got it. . . Everybody had a piece and a part and it was amazing that everybody got on board. . . Everybody wants a better school system.” The school system was not the “turf” of any one entity, everyone had a stake in the outcome, so they were able share decision-making, power-share, and work together.

Now – Strategic Action:
Evelyn is aware of the need for RCAP to create the way in which they will pick up the “backbone organization” roles (Garber & Adams, 2017) required for sustaining partnering in the community. Higher education community-engagement scholarship generated connections in the community, including engagement with other higher education institutions that are now involved in the community in ways they had not been before RCAP was established. Yet, Evelyn recognizes there are entities and populations that are not included in the Executive Committee and top-level decision-making, which is a function of leadership at the member entities.

Meanwhile, the intentional reach of the IWGs brings more diversity to the table where democratic discourse is significant for sustained partnering. Evelyn believes, “If we can transfer
the work and the model of Allied into their way of being. If we've taught them how to fish, we've been successful.” What Evelyn calls the “Allied Effect” is bringing people together in democratic discourse. The project is the icing, but the partnering is the cake.

Summary narrative: Frances’ narrative is one of being an outsider to Rural County, while understanding and respecting the strong beliefs of those who grow up in the rural South. In her partnering experiences, she is sensitive to those beliefs, and strategically supports the community in overcoming narratives that are limiting personal and community growth and development.

Participant 6 (Pseudonym Frances) has experience working in higher education community engagement – though she didn’t know about “community engagement” as a discipline until our interview. The work that brought her into the RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership) is focused on increasing high school students’ access to higher education, and reflects her personal narrative as a first-generation college graduate. Moving from “Self” to “Us” to “Now” (Ganz, 2009), Frances recognizes the implications of her outsider position, and is committed to her reasons for partnering (Self). She has experienced the shared values that motivate the Partnership (Us), and understands the strategic action steps she can take based on community plans and hope for the future (Now).

Self – Relationship-building:
Frances grew up in Nexton, which is a few miles down the highway in the county to the west of Rural. “Well, I’m an outsider, I’m not from Smallville.” Nexton has historically been the standard to which Smallville has compared itself – and in the comparison, Smallville always seems to come up lacking. The RU Allied Professionals have encouraged RCAP not to compare Smallville to Nexton: “If you have to compare yourself, choose a municipality that is statistically more similar to Smallville” (cf P3); but, as Frances’ comments confirm, vestiges of the comparison narrative and its impacts endure.

Historically, Smallville folks don’t take kindly to Nexton folks coming over to tell Smallville how to improve. So, when in Smallville/Rural County, Frances stays quiet about her ties to Nexton, and points out that her father graduated from Smallville High School, and that her cousins are Smallville natives, which actually makes a difference in how Smallville/Rural County people receive her.

Frances notes that the same “outsider” status holds true for the RU Allied Professionals: “I could see it happening that when the Allied group got started, there probably were some people at the table (and I don’t know this for a fact), but I could just see that it probably was, people were like ‘How dare you, with your all big self, come from Research University, coming down to my town and telling me how to do things.’ That was brought up at the meeting recently. It was a joke saying that Smallville was the ‘City of No.’”

Frances trades on her insider family connections in Rural County so that she can participate in RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership) as an insider. She partners with Smallville High School in her work, and her experience is that “[Allied] has been the means [for me] to make connections with people who care about what’s actually happening within the community, some of the leaders.” Because she understands the power of the Smallville/Nexton
comparison narrative, she brings her family ties and concerns for the community to the forefront to establish trust in partnering with others in Rural County.

Us – Motivation:

Frances had not been fully informed about how the RCAP worked until she had the opportunity to attend an Executive Committee meeting: “I come from the evil enemy of Nexton that’s next door... For me personally, and not being from this community, it took me a few minutes to get up to speed about exactly [how] we were working... we’re all siloed, I come in with my mission... [but] to look at all the things that [RCAP] wants to accomplish for this community!” In the Executive Committee meeting, she experienced the energy of equitable power-sharing of information, needs, resources, and decision-making among community entities, which she was not aware of in RCAP until that point.

Now – Strategic Action:

“[RCAP] gives me an opportunity to look at the community as a whole and figure out where we, where I can fit in... so, what do we need to do to make sure that the students are prepared to be citizens who can give back to Rural County. Not just citizens who get these great wonderful degrees and then have to go to the metropolitan areas to make a living.”

Her life story includes being impacted by a narrative in rural communities that sustains a fear of children being “over-educated” and leaving home to find work commensurate with their education. “A lot of families hold onto their children because [they believe] ’if I educate my child, they’re going to leave.’” There are also families who want their children to be educated, but they are intimidated by higher education, and don’t know how to support their child in getting information needed to access higher education institutions – whether technical, community, regional, or state colleges and universities.

Frances sees her role, in partnering with the high school, parents, businesses, and other higher education institutions on the IWG Committee, as helping students take strategic steps in high school that will keep their education options open in the future. Having higher education options open in the future can have a positive impact not only on individual lives, but also on the community’s future. [cf P4’s narrative].

Summary narrative: Ginny’s partnering has emerged from a strong commitment to staying centered in RCAP’s mission of providing neutral support and resources for the community’s greater good. She is personally committed to remaining neutral in RCAP’s determinations of how the greater good is defined through consensus, and ways in which RCAP takes strategic action to create sustainability.

Participant 7 (Pseudonym Ginny) was one of the original partners in RCAP (Rural County Allied Partnership). She was attending a leadership training when an Operations Coordinator of the RU Allied Partnership approached her about Rural County partnering with RU to be considered an Allied Community. Of course, she had to ask, “What’s that?” but once she learned about the concept, she was on-board. She returned to Smallville and called the City Manager, who called the Mayor, who connected with the founder of the RU Allied Partnership. The various stakeholders who had expressed interest came together to support the idea.
Ginny became the Chair of the RCAP Executive Committee “by default” when the Operations Coordinator who worked with them to establish RCAP decided Ginny was in the ideal position to chair the committee. Ginny is a journalist, and her family owns the local newspaper, so she does not represent a partner entity and is not a RCAP voting member. Her neutrality allows her to facilitate meetings, offer input, make connections, and support the work of RCAP without being tied to any one entity’s mission – she supports all of the partner entities’ missions, and the collective mission of the Partnership. She has taken up leadership in moving from “Self” to “Us” (Ganz, 2009), but is unsure about moving forward into “Now” for strategic action.

**Self – Relationship-building:**

Ginny and her husband (editor of the local newspaper) are alums of the RU School of Journalism, so they have a well-developed affinity for anything connected to RU. They were participating in Leadership State when Ginny was approached by an Allied staff member about the Allied Partnership. Ginny saw the opportunity to practice the principles she was learning in Leadership State, so she took up a leadership role as it was presented to her, even though she was anxious about doing so. She was particularly concerned about the funds required from partnering entities in the community: “We are a no-frills community.” RCAP began with a half-year commitment with RU, which lessened the funds needed from each entity: “When we split it out amongst the various entities, it seemed like a smaller ask. And by the time the next year came . . . they had seen the good that Allied had been able to do, and . . . it seems worth it to everybody [now].”

Ginny experienced people “bumping against each other” (Clandinin, 2013) in the start-up, with various personalities having negative impacts, and with misinformation about the start-up process being broadcast statewide. She learned to keep moving forward and work to create the RCAP narrative that they wanted to nurture, rather than feed the misinformed story. She experienced that fences can’t always be mended and consensus cannot always be reached. Ginny’s narrative includes attempting to reach out; but then letting go of misunderstandings that cannot be resolved, and simply moving forward. She has been caught between relationship-building and holding fast to RCAP’s mission, making difficult decisions and being clear about her intentions.

**Us – Motivation:**

By the time RCAP the Allied Professional position was filled, a “we” identity had been established for Ginny. She refers to RCAP as “we” in her story: “We had another issue that was difficult . . . we took on a humongous project right away . . . that was controversial.” Meanwhile, the County leadership was in transition, so it was challenging to get any momentum from the efforts RCAP made to support the project. The project is in the County’s hands presently, and is still fraught with funding and political challenges. “It’s important to say what we [RCAP] are and what we’re not. So that we can stay true to what we are.”

Ginny believes one of the important missions of RCAP is being “a living laboratory” for students. She is clear that working with students is a significant piece of RCAP’s mission for everyone involved: “The people on our Board have enjoyed helping the students.” Yet, the motivation from the “Us” is not quite apparent for Ginny to move forward into strategic actions for the “Now” (Ganz, 2009).
**Now – Strategic Action:**

Ginny is concerned that not having RU embedded in the community (via the Allied Professional) means there will not be access to faculty and students to the great extent that RCAP has experienced, and that the vehicle for community-wide information sharing will be lost. A vision and energy has not yet emerged in RCAP for a “backbone organization” (Garber & Adams, 2017) that picks up the roles and responsibilities that the RU Allied partners have played in RCAP. She sees the Allied Professional and the faculty/students as the “glue and purpose” for the RCAP, and does not yet see the community itself being the glue and purpose for action.