This study investigates student reasons for resisting engagement with school in a rural Appalachian area. The concept of student resistance to school is considered within a White, working-class student population. Through classroom observations, students displaying resistant behaviors were selected to participate in interviews. Coding of interview data and comparisons with observation data resulted in three main themes: family values and expectations, quality and relevance of education, and misunderstandings between teachers and students. These themes underscore the various tensions experienced by students whose schools encourage higher education and abstract concepts, but whose parents encourage values of family and vocational work. Thus, the students do not value the education provided by the school, leading to disengagement and misunderstandings with teachers. The article includes implications and recommendations for schools to reverse the negative perception of resistance and use student resistance as a conversation for critical change.

Modern societies, particularly those functioning under oppressive circumstances, highly value revolutionaries, change makers, social agents, and critical thinkers. People who evaluate and question the status quo and critique aspects of society often benefit from their development of self-awareness and leadership skills (Giroux, 1983; Shor, 1992). These people function as social change agents who liberate themselves and others from oppressive situations, empowering underrepresented groups (Giroux, 1983). In such cases, they may be seen as highly resistant to current social norms, but in the long run, these people make a positive impact on the evolution of society.

In contrast, students who resist schooling are rarely considered to make a positive contribution to society. These students may feel disconnected from school and question the purpose of schooling, and they display their feelings through acts of resistance. However, teachers and school administrators often label these actions as misbehavior and administer disciplinary consequences to these students. As a result, resistant students often have negative school experiences that perpetuate the inequalities that are causing them to resist (Kohl, 1991; Willis, 1977). Future opportunities in life may be limited by a lack of academic credentials or being labeled as unwilling or unable to learn (Kohl, 1991). These students never experience the sense of freedom or control over their destinies that other resistant change agents in society may enjoy (Giroux, 1983; Shor, 1992; Sekayi, 2001).

Few studies about student resistance involve White students in rural areas; the majority concern ethnic and racial minority populations in urban areas. However, inequalities in socioeconomic status can lead to resistance in rural areas. Teachers generally come from middle class backgrounds, but students in rural areas frequently come from low-income families. This can result in a culture clash between students with close-knit families valuing place-based
knowledge and teachers with a message of worldliness. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the gap in the student resistance literature by identifying and examining student resistant attitudes towards schooling in a rural school district.

**Literature Review**

Student resistance has been referred to as willful not-learning, school refusal, disengagement, alienation, apathy, noncompliance, attitude or defiance (Abowitz, 2000; Dickar, 2008; Gilmore, 1985; Kohl, 1991; McLaren, 1985). McLaren (1985) defines resistance as “oppositional student behavior . . . which contests the legitimacy, power, and significance of school culture in general and instruction in particular” (p. 85). Not all student misbehavior can be attributed to resistance, but often the behaviors are similar. Students may resist passively, such as sleeping in class, not doing class work, slouching in seats and rolling eyes; or actively, such as confronting the teacher, talking in class, causing disruptions, and asking questions at inappropriate times (Abowitz, 2000; Dickar, 2008; Giroux, 1983; Kohl, 1991; Olafson & Field, 2003; Walker & Sylwester, 1998).

Resistance theory suggests that resistant students are not intentional troublemakers; instead, student resistance is generally thought to occur as a reaction to social reproduction manifested in schools. According to reproduction theory, schools reproduce social norms by teaching specific types of knowledge and skills, preparing students for work within their social class (Giroux, 1983; Hebdige, 1979). Some students who are not content with the status quo of the school experience actively partake in resistant acts, either attempting to subvert the dominant culture of school or resisting an active part in the school experience (Anyon, 1980; Giroux, 1983; Willis, 1977). Working-class students reacting to oppression or culture clash may resist controlling aspects of the school process itself, such as the content of the curriculum or the teaching process (Aggleton, 1987).

However, since Willis’s landmark 1977 study, very few studies have examined the phenomena of student resistance in rural, working-class areas. In fact, none of the resistance studies located for this review examined students in the Appalachian region or dynamics of resistance within current research on rural areas. Thus, following sections report research on students in rural areas that have potential links to resistance and reproduction theory.

**Student and Teacher Rapport**

A robust body of literature supports the correlation between student engagement in school and teacher rapport and respect. Students who fail to form meaningful relationships with teachers or develop a sense of school belonging are more likely to disengage with school (Burroughs, 2007; Good & Brophy, 1974; McFarland, 2001; Rueda, 2005, 2006).

These dynamics may be compounded by cultural differences in rural areas. Many teachers and school administrators in rural schools come from suburban or urban settings and middle class backgrounds and have difficulty understanding and relating to students (Purcell-Gates, 2002). These school employees lack awareness of local knowledge, values, economics, and social networks and do not have the histories and relationships with the community that the students possess (Corbett, 2007). Teachers may be less understanding of students with different cultural values if they are inconsistent with the values and norms familiar to the teacher (Sheets, 1996). In particular, linguistic patterns can cause discord within the classroom, particularly with regard to the linguistic rules for achieving power in the classroom (Delpit, 1995).

Further, teachers sometimes make assumptions about the students in rural schools, mistakenly attributing poverty to habits associated with poor people and blaming parents and families for living in poverty; some school employees in rural areas trivialize students’ knowledge and culture with a “saving the poor” attitude toward education (Howley, Howley, Howley, & Howley, 2006). In contrast, Kohl (1991) engaged resistant students in classroom learning by enabling students to save face and encouraging students’ questions and challenges.
Conflict of Opportunity

One source of tension for students in rural areas is the lack of economic opportunity coupled with family values of cohesiveness. Students in rural areas can highly value a sense of community and family relationships (Deaton, 2008; Herzog & Pittman, 1995). As a result, these students are more focused on the well-being of the family group than individual achievement or personal goals (Deaton, 2008). Rather than leaving for college, some students may be pressured to choose family cohesiveness and remain in the area (Corbett, 2007).

However, employment opportunities in rural areas have been decreasing with the decline of farming, mining, and fishing industries (Corbett, 2007). Thus, a higher proportion of working adults in rural areas are employed in working-class, low-paid jobs with little opportunity for advancement (Herzog & Pittman, 1995; Lucas, 1971), and people who attain higher education may educate themselves out of a job in the area (Corbett, 2007; Starcher, 2005). Students who do well in school and leave to obtain college degrees can have difficulty finding jobs in the community and may move elsewhere to secure a higher income (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Thus, “to resist schooling is therefore to resist mobility” and commit oneself to membership in the community (Corbett, 2007, p. 57).

Relevance of Education

Because jobs in the area do not require education, many students believe school education cannot help them in the future (Dehyle, 1995; Starcher, 2005). Further, many families in rural areas have not seen economic advancement as a result of schooling, so school is frequently not seen as a way to escape poverty or provide upward mobility (Corbett, 2007; Starcher, 2005). On the other hand, schools tend to promote the idea that good grades and graduation will lead to success and an improved socio-economic status (Fordham, 1996).

Often, the knowledge taught in school contradicts the working-class knowledge that is more valuable to the students’ everyday lives (McFadden, 1995; Riley, 1996). Schools frequently portray a message of worldliness and broadening horizons, which tends to be inconsistent with place-based local values and local knowledge (Holt, 1995; Corbett, 2007). Willis (1977) found that groups of people have developed certain skills that are useful in their cultural circle, but are not helpful in developing other skills, including school achievement. For students whose family knowledge and experience conflicts with school ideology, school success means giving in to the dominant middle class culture and rejecting the family (Finn, 1999; Kipnis, 2001; Rueda, 2005). When forced with this choice, many students choose family success over traditional school values and disengage with school (Fordham, 1996; Munns & McFadden, 2000; Starcher, 2005).

Place-based education has the potential to bridge the gap between school content and local communities through locally relevant curricula, particularly in rural areas (Klein, Howley, & Howley, 2010). According to Smith (2002), place-based education “adopts local environments—social, cultural, economic, political, and natural—as the context for a significant share of students’ educational experiences” (p. 30). This engages students in real problems related to community concerns and student interests, building a desire to learn. Place-based curricula also has the potential to help stimulate the local economy and revitalize the community (Doeden, 2001; Hynes, 2003). However, place-based curricula have not been widely used because their effectiveness relies upon their relation to the local place and culture and is not generalizable (Smith, 2002; Wither, 2001). While this topic is growing in the literature, research remains limited.

Methodology

Setting

The study was conducted at a small high school in Appalachian Ohio. The school, pseudonymous Pierce High School, is the only high school in the district. A vocational school is located on the school’s campus so students do not leave to attend vocational courses. Further,
some students from other high schools in the county come to Pierce for their vocational courses. Pierce High School is located in a low-income area; the median household income is $19,971 compared to the national average of $41,994 (US Census Bureau, 2000). No institutions of higher education are located in the county. According to the state report card, 36% of graduates had taken the ACT and the mean score was 19 (Ohio Department of Education, 2009).

Observational Data Collection
This study took a constructivist approach with a basic interpretive qualitative research design (Patton, 2002). Interpretive qualitative research, while borrowing from phenomenology in the sense that it attempts to capture and describe how people experience the world, does not claim to be free of bias (Patton, 2002). Nonparticipant observations were completed over eight weeks, with 67 class periods observed. Both junior and senior level general and college preparatory required courses were observed: notably, English, mathematics, and senior government. During the observations, copious anecdotal and reflective field notes described direct events in class and researcher impressions afterwards (Patton, 2002). Observational data was used to select students for interviews, develop interview questions, and refine the data analysis.

During observations, resistant students were identified for potential interviews via purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). Resistance was operationally defined as open and outward displays of opposition to schooling, the school environment, and the behavioral and academic expectations of students. Resistant students were identified by the following typical behaviors: sleeping during class, not paying attention during class, defiant body language in class, not turning in assignments including homework and class work, not working on class work, distracting other students, challenging the teacher, causing disruptions in class, talking during class, skipping class, and making negative comments about the teacher or school.

In addition to consistent displays of resistance, interview subjects were also chosen based on poor grades (Ds or Fs in the subjects observed). Triangulation of sampling methods in this way enhanced the researcher’s choice of the most resistant students (Patton, 2002). All students in each class were asked to fill out a form indicating interest in participating in an interview. Identified resistant students who indicated an interest in the interview were approached with consent forms. Those students who returned consent forms scheduled interviews during study hall periods.

Interview Data Collection and Analysis
Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended to allow for probing of student responses (Patton, 2002). Students were asked general questions about school and future plans, as well as specific questions relating to individual student’s behavior in class. General questions are listed in Table 1. The specific questions related directly to incidents observed in class, and differed for each student. Sample questions included “I noticed you sleep a lot during class. Why is that?” and “What happened before you were sent to the office the other day?” Because much of the literature on student resistance, and schooling in general, frequently reports teacher or parent perspectives, this study intended to privilege the students’ voices. The importance of the student voice in research and decision-making has regained attention in recent years (Mitra, 2004).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed and then were coded by topic. Relevant observation data (for example, if it conflicted with or reinforced interview data) were included in the analysis as well. Including observation data in the analysis allowed for triangulation of data sources to confirm or disconfirm interview data (Patton, 2002). Coding followed grounded theory methods, allowing the themes to emerge inductively from the data (Charmaz, 2006). Specific codes regarding school resistance emerged, such as pleasing parents and no time for homework. These codes were examined for similarities and connections, and were then grouped into increasingly larger and broader categories. In general, the concept of resistance
developed three angles, each of which influenced student resistance in a different way: parental influence, school factors, and student behavior. Thus, these three angles became the defining themes of the study: family values and expectations, quality and relevance of education, and misunderstandings between teachers and students. A second analysis of the raw data revealed further codes that had not been identified in the first analysis. See Table 2 for the organization of the categories into the themes.

**Limitations**

Some limitations may have affected the data. As this study was meant to privilege the student voice, only students were interviewed. Although interviews with parents, teachers, and other community members may have contributed to this discussion, for the purpose of this study they were not included. However, the lack of triangulation of interview sources leads to

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**Table 1:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student names</th>
<th>Dan</th>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Cody</th>
<th>Jody</th>
<th>Colton</th>
<th>Kelsey</th>
<th>Taylor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male or female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational program</td>
<td>Welding</td>
<td>Welding</td>
<td>A+ (computers)</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Work study</td>
<td>Cosmetology</td>
<td>Welding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistant behaviors observed</td>
<td>Sleeps in class, talks to friends, does not participate, take notes, or complete homework</td>
<td>Talks in class, interrupts teacher with questions and input, does not take notes or complete homework</td>
<td>Sleeps in class, does not take notes, class clown, argues with teacher</td>
<td>Talks to friends loudly in class, argues with teacher, defiant, tries to leave class</td>
<td>Sleeps in class, does not take notes or do homework, argues with teacher</td>
<td>Argue with teacher, does not take notes, talks loudly in class</td>
<td>Not in seat, talking in class, does not take notes, argues with teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future college plans</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Military or college</td>
<td>Classes near Pierce</td>
<td>Dreams of college, expects military</td>
<td>College in NYC</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family relationships or influence</td>
<td>Going into father’s business</td>
<td>Parents do not want him to move away, do not support future career</td>
<td>Family close</td>
<td>Family lives close, does not care what she does</td>
<td>Family close</td>
<td>Wants her to stay close, close but also fight</td>
<td>Going into father’s business, close family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived class behavior</td>
<td>Normal student, slacker</td>
<td>Pays attention, participates, does all hw</td>
<td>Class clown</td>
<td>Does not try, talks a lot</td>
<td>Sleeps a lot, enough to get by, jokester</td>
<td>Rude, obnoxious</td>
<td>Good grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to live in Pierce</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Other familiar location</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents encourage college</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future career plans</td>
<td>Own mechanic shop</td>
<td>Racing business</td>
<td>Computer programming</td>
<td>Open daycare</td>
<td>Actor or storm chaser</td>
<td>Own art/design business</td>
<td>Welding with father</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
only one source of direct information—the students. The accuracy of the data may be limited by the honesty of the students interviewed. While I made every effort to portray myself as unaffiliated with the teachers or school, the students may have hesitated to give answers that would be unappealing to a school employee. Further, not all students approached for interviews returned the consent form, so some of the students who displayed the most resistance were not interviewed.

Findings
The analysis of the classroom observations and student interviews yielded three themes: family values and expectations, quality and relevance of education, and misunderstandings between teachers and students. These themes are described and illustrated in this section, first through an analysis of a single student’s experience and second through descriptions as illustrated by the other participants. The case example provides a deep examination of a typical student’s experience and the contradictions in his thinking. Although Cody recognized the conflict between his behavior and teacher expectations, he was not able to acknowledge the contradictions between his future plans and his current attitude toward coursework. The second part of each theme, the elaborated descriptions, reveal the ways in which other participants experience similar situations.

Participant Profiles
Seven students, five male and two female, were selected to be interviewed. Of the five males, three were juniors and two were seniors. Both females were juniors: one was repeating her junior year in order to begin the cosmetology vocational program.

Dan was a senior in the welding program. In English class, he sat in the back of the classroom and talked quietly to his friends during class discussions. He rarely participated, did not take notes, and did not complete his class work. The only time I observed him raise his hand to participate, the teacher never called on him, and he eventually put his hand down and turned back to his friends. In government, Dan again sat in the back of the classroom with his friends,
and he was often reprimanded for talking or not paying attention during lectures. He did not talk back to the teachers, but made quiet comments to his friends afterwards.

Mark was a senior at another school in the county but was enrolled in the vocational welding program. Thus, he traveled to Pierce High School for English, government, and welding classes. At the time of the interview, he had just left the welding program due to a disagreement, and he was not clear about what he planned to do next. Mark was always fully engaged in class, frequently commenting, asking questions, and extending the lesson to other topics, but he never took notes or completed homework. His government teacher did not appreciate his frequent interruptions and often asked him to wait or be quiet, sometimes reprimanding him. When working on a group project in English one day, he wandered around the room talking to other groups and never participated with his group’s work.

Cody was a junior in the A+ computer vocational program. Due to being suspended for half of the previous year, he was also making up sophomore-level classes. Cody frequently slept in class, ignored the teacher, and neglected to take notes. He seemed angry and resentful about making up the coursework, complaining about it often. In math class, he frequently challenged the teacher loudly, interrupting the lesson and making rude remarks. In English, he made loud jokes for other students’ enjoyment and often complained about the class work.

Jody was a junior enrolled in agriculture and horticulture courses, working towards a State Degree in agriculture. Jody was frequently sent to the principal’s office for loud disruptive behavior in math class, and she usually complained and defiantly stomped out of the room. She frequently argued with the teacher, did not have her homework, and complained about being reprimanded for not having her homework completed. In English, she asked for hall passes multiple times each day, and preferred to read in the hallway.

Colton was a senior who was a year behind due to frequent mobility between school districts over the years. Colton often slept through class, responding sharply and aggressively to teachers who try to wake him. He never took notes or participated in math class, and he never had his homework completed. He responded negatively and disrespectfully to teacher requests. In English class, Colton joked about being far behind in the reading but he did not read during class.

Kelsey was repeating her junior year in order to take the courses in the cosmetology program and to make up some credits she had failed the previous year. She had transferred to Pierce High School that year in order to join the cosmetology program. Kelsey usually failed to complete her homework and often drew in her notebook instead of taking notes. She engaged in confrontations with teachers, challenging them and complaining loudly in class. A few times, she was sent to the principal’s office for misbehavior.

Taylor was a junior enrolled in the vocational welding program, but before he started, he had been enrolled in college preparation courses. Taylor frequently walked around the classroom during lectures in math class, sometimes stopping at his friends’ desks to talk. He rarely took notes or had his homework completed, and he was frequently absent from school. When teachers challenged his behavior, he responded sharply and disrespectfully.

**Family Values and Expectations**

The first theme involved a divergence between school values (e.g. grades, college) and home values (e.g. family, not moving away). Schools typically advocated college attendance, moving away from home, and gaining experience in the world. However, students reported that their families encouraged them to go into the family business, usually a vocational trade, and did not find college to be necessary. Although students at Pierce recognized the push for college attendance, they appeared to be more influenced by their parents and families.

Cody experienced the first theme as a tension between school and parental expectations. He wanted to please his parents, and so he attempted to follow school rules in order to avoid
trouble with his parents. Much of his extended family lived in the area, and he enjoyed their physical and emotional closeness. He explained that “Pierce is where I was all my life” and that he wanted to return to the area. Cody said, “No one else in my house has been to college so far, so they’re hopin’ I’m the first.” According to Cody, his parents were not familiar with the logistics of college, and were not actively encouraging college applications. He explained that he might study computers, but clarified that would be “if” he attended college. He said that he wanted to make a lot of money so he could take care of his parents.

This theme seen in Cody’s story was found woven into other students’ stories as well. The students reported valuing their parents’ opinions and wanting to please them. Dan explained that his parents’ opinions were important to him. He said, “I try to keep my parents happy.” Students often reiterated their family’s expectations for their futures. At one point in the interview, Taylor explained that he was not certain if he wanted to attend welding school, but he would because of his father: “My dad wants me to do what he does, but I always thought about going to college for so many years and becoming something where I can pretty much sit in an office with a nice, cool air conditioner and make more money, you know?” Taylor concluded that despite these reservations, he was planning to attend the one-year welding program after high school.

Because students’ families were important to them, students seemed to be influenced by their family members’ hopes for the students’ future careers. According to students, their families discouraged them from moving away from the area, and most students expressed their desire to return to the community. Mark’s parents did not want him to go to college four hours away; they preferred that he stay nearby. Mark conceded, “I’d like to stay in this general area.” Although Kelsey did not agree with her parents, she remarked on their desire for her to remain close to Pierce rather than move to New York. She said, “None of them really like it because it’s so far away... they just want me to be somewhere safe, like the country.”

Several students explained that their families did not know much about college or did not encourage college. Mark said that his parents never finished high school, and so they were “ignorant towards the fact of what’s required for college” and they were not fond of the idea of his plans to go away to earn his two-year certificate. Colton explained that he wanted to go to college, but, “My parents think that I should drop out and get my GED and take the easy road.” When elaborating on what her family thinks of college attendance, Jody said simply, “They don’t mind it.” The students also seemed undecided about which college to attend. Mark explained, “I don’t feel the pressure to further my education,” and Jody was not sure if she would take community college courses after graduation.

Students also reported that their families encouraged work that did not require a college degree, particularly if the occupation involved the family business. Most of these jobs were vocational careers that required only a year or two of technical training. Many students explained that they intended to study the same trade as their parents, or that they wanted to work at the family business. For example, Taylor said about welding school, “my dad went there, so he wants me to go. He supports me 100%.” After obtaining his certificate, he planned to go to work with his father and uncle.

Quality and Relevance of Education
The second theme involved the students’ reported feelings about the quality of the education received at the school. Students reported that the content of their courses did not relate to their lives beyond the direct application of skills learned in their vocational courses. While many students commented on the value of a diploma in obtaining a job, they did not seem to value the academic coursework represented by the diploma.

In relation to the second theme, Cody disliked his classes and felt that the required classes would not be helpful for his future life or career. He said that he did not take college preparatory classes, even though the guidance counselor recommended them, because he did not
want the extra work. He admitted, “I just apply what’s needed, enough to make me pass,” only completing his homework when it would be graded. In some classes, Cody felt that “we don’t learn nothing,” so he did not pay attention or do the homework, even though he was failing those classes. He needed a diploma if he wanted to have a good job, so he said, “I just wanna get through; I wanna survive, get it done.” Cody explained that he would rather spend his time in school doing “somethin’ useful—to me, I mean—what I think would be useful.” For example, he enjoyed his computer classes because he could do hands-on work repairing computers and providing technology support around the school.

Many students reported beliefs similar to Cody’s, including the type of activities completed in classes. Unless the class involved hands-on work, the students did not enjoy the class and said that they did not “do anything” in that class. Jody explained, “most of the classes I have, we don’t really do work in.” On the other hand, students explained that hands-on classes like physics, welding, and gym helped them to learn. Dan explained, “In welding, we do hands-on stuff and it’s not all bookwork,” and he tried to do as many projects as possible. Colton said that he was better with hands-on classes like drama and gym that allowed him to display his learning physically, rather than classes that required memorization.

Similarly, several students explained that the content of their courses, with the exception of the vocational programs, did not relate to their lives. Kelsey said that teachers “think it’s going to affect our lives, but it’s really not. My classes that I’m taking right now, I really don’t need to succeed in what I want to do in life.” Some students said they had already learned everything they could from school; for example, Colton said that he already knew “enough to get me by in the future” and didn’t understand how some courses would be helpful. On the other hand, both Dan and Kelsey clarified that their vocational courses related directly to their futures.

When describing the purpose of school, students provided characteristics of vocational or blue-collar careers, and explained that they learned more outside of school subjects. Taylor, Dan, and Colton said that the purpose of school is to prepare them to have a routine in the future, when they will need to wake up in the morning and go to their jobs every day. Likewise, several students explained that they learned just as much outside of school and through the social aspects of school. Colton stated that he learned more at work than at school. Mark said, “There’s a lot of other things in life you can learn and apply than what a school has to offer,” and Kelsey and Jody both reported learning more from social interactions than from class work.

Although the students described the uselessness of school and many of the classes, the students did understand the value of a high school diploma in achieving further training and education and obtaining a good job. Many students spoke about their impatience to complete school and receive their diplomas. Taylor explained the importance of a diploma when he said, “If you want a good job to support a family in a nice home and a nice car, you’re gonna have to educate yourself, so you’re gonna have to get a high school diploma.” However, many students explained that they simply did not put in the effort needed to do well in school. Colton and Jody said they did the minimum amount of work necessary to pass the class or receive their diploma.

**Misunderstandings Between Teachers and Students**

The final theme related to discord between student behavior and teacher expectations. Students felt that their teachers failed to understand them or accommodate special student circumstances. Incongruence in the meaning of classroom behavior was evident; teachers viewed certain classroom behavior as disruptive, while students believed that this behavior was fun and entertaining for the teacher.

The third theme can be seen in Cody’s suspension the previous year and his classroom behavior. He had been suspended from school for having a knife in his backpack, which he qualified as a misunderstanding. Cody worked on a farm and hunted on the weekends, and he had forgotten that a knife used for farm work was still in his backpack that Monday. Although the school rule
prohibited weapons in school, Cody felt that he was treated unfairly because it was an accident. Further, Cody acknowledged that teachers did not appreciate his class clown behavior. He said, “I try to be funny, lighten stuff up a bit. Goof off….It’s just—I don’t know what teachers see—if they see differently than what people my age see. It’s like speaking two different languages, like what I’m saying to them, they mean something different to me.” Although he disliked school and had a poor relationship with some teachers, he said, “I don’t wanna come off as bad person to somebody.” Cody acknowledged that the teachers viewed his actions as misbehavior, yet he did not express a desire to stop.

Students often expressed their feeling that some teachers misunderstood them or did not respect them. Colton explained that he did not pay attention in class because, “There’s no point. Even if I did pay attention, she wouldn’t care. She wouldn’t notice. So there’s no point in even trying.” It was important for students to feel that the teacher cared about them. Dan explained that he had given up trying to participate in one class because the teacher favored a select group of students and only allowed this group to tackle interesting projects. Mark said that he tried to stay engaged in class, but “Every time I go to say something she’ll cut me off. She wants us to ask her questions, but I’m like, you shut me out here.” Similarly, Colton felt that some teachers did not care about the students, so he questioned, “Why should we take time out for them if they don’t take time out for us?”

Sometimes the teachers failed to understand student issues or accommodate their special circumstances. For example, Taylor was reprimanded for standing near his friend’s desk and talking after class had begun. When the teacher spoke to him about the incident after class, Taylor explained that his pregnant girlfriend had been in the hospital, and he was trying to get advice from his friend who was also a father. The teacher listened to his story but closed the conversation with the threat, “You’re still getting written up—big time!” In another situation, Colton explained that he had not have his homework finished because he went straight to work after school. He said, “They expect you to have it done, and it’s not your fault, but it is your fault. It’s kind of a lose-lose situation.” In both examples, teachers did not appear to empathize with the multiple pressures that the students had in their lives, such as balancing high school with pregnancies or jobs.

Some students who were observed getting in trouble for their behavior in class said in the interviews that their classroom behavior was good, and they joked around in class to liven things up and make the teacher laugh. According to Colton, “I’m more of a jokester, to be truthful, but I mean no harm.” Kelsey explained, “I don’t ever really get in trouble. I’ll say, “oh, you love me,” and then she’ll laugh. And then everything will be kind of better.” Similarly, Taylor said, “I’m pretty much a class clown, but I always know when it’s time to stop, you know, start paying attention so I can learn. I make all my teachers laugh. I really don’t get in a lot of trouble in class.” However, these students were observed getting into trouble for their joking behavior in these classes. During the observations, the teachers did not appear to enjoy or appreciate the students’ behavior, as they often wrote behavior reports for those students or sent them to the office.

Discussion

Through the findings, a common thread developed for these resistant students at Pierce High School. The general story for these students is as follows. First, the students described the importance of family cohesion and abiding their parents’ wishes. Because families reportedly encouraged vocational work that enabled the students to stay in the area, the students often did not expect to attend college. Therefore, many students did not believe the school provided a quality education relevant to their lives. Only the vocational and hands-on courses were important to the students, and they applied just enough effort to earn their diplomas. Students described the failure of teachers to understand the multiple influences on students, and this misunderstanding resulted in negative consequences for the students. Thus, parents and families, teachers, and the students themselves all contributed to the dynamics of resistance.
In this case and according to student responses, parents contributed to student resistance through their tacit expectations for the students. The students highly valued their parents’ opinions, as in Deaton (2008) and Herzog and Pittman (1995), wanting to please their parents and thereby internalizing the hopes and expectations of their parents. The parents, according to the students, valued family cohesiveness and wanted students to obtain jobs in the community. Because the majority of jobs in the area were low-paying and required low levels of education, students who obtained higher education may not be able to find jobs in the area. Therefore, ultimately neither family values nor potential career opportunities in the region encouraged student educational achievement.

The school system also perpetuated student resistance through the incompatibility of academic content and community life. Many students reported a belief that school subjects did not relate to their lives and would not help them in the future. Schools frequently promote cosmopolitan, worldly knowledge that is inconsistent with place-based knowledge and local connections, two strategies that might engage students in learning (Corbett, 2007). Thus, the students did not seem to buy into the process of school, and they neglected class work and homework. The disparity of home values and school values alienated students from school and possible higher education.

Ultimately, the students’ misbehavior in class and resistance toward the education presented at the school may have been a reaction to these intersecting dynamics of parental influence and school values. At school, students were likely presented with ideas of college and worldliness, providing the students with dreams that they could aspire to—but these dreams starkly contrasted their parents’ expectations. These students justified their resistant actions by blaming the teachers for not relating to them, much like the findings of Burroughs (2007). This may have been a result of students’ attempts to save face and protect their culture by confronting teachers and disengaging with coursework, while lacking a critical understanding of these disparities.

**Future Research**
Because resistance and critical thinking are such important issues for students and schools, more research should examine these dynamics. First, rural areas are often overlooked in favor of studies in urban or suburban areas, but the complex dynamics in these areas and the number of students attending rural schools make them worthy of study. Second, more studies in the area of resistance and school change should give resistant students a voice. Schools serve all students, not just those who succeed easily, and the opinions of all students can be valuable. Finally, while this study was focused on the student perspective, future research should interview parents, teachers, and community members. Strategies that can turn resistance from a negative to a positive and that are already employed by teachers should be examined and replicated.

**Implications**
In sum, the data reveal multiple conflicting factors that may contribute to student resistance to school. Potential solutions to student resistance in rural schools could address some of these contradictions in student thinking, notably messages about college, the relevance of school, and outlets for critiquing their situation.

The first conflict for students was between the messages they received from home versus school regarding college and potential career options. Students often receive information about college at school, but they may have been receiving conflicting messages at home for years before they arrive at school. While parents’ beliefs should not be trivialized, students can be shown that they do not have to choose between their families and a potential career. It is possible for students to obtain higher education and start a business in the area, or telecommute to businesses in more urban areas. Students who attend college and return to the community may be able to strengthen the viability of the community itself.
The second conflict experienced by these students related to the relevance or irrelevance of academic school subjects, decreasing their motivation to do the assigned work. While vocational courses have an explicit relation to careers, other “academic” courses do not. Teachers in rural areas can attempt to bridge the gap between school knowledge and place-based knowledge by connecting school content to “real life” and local content. Place-based learning presents educational activities that attempt to solve a community problem. In this way, students can be engaged in education-centered work that is good for the community and reinforces their family values.

Finally, students faced an inconsistency in their understanding of their own classroom behavior and resistance toward school. Teachers can open a dialogue with students to help them think through their critique of school and understand the reasons for their actions and beliefs about school. Then, students can direct their energy into positive channels, vocalizing their concerns with school practices and advocating for change in their schools and communities. These opportunities would give students a role in changing their own behavior and developing positive solutions for school conflicts. Student resistance can therefore be an asset to rural schools and communities because it encourages a dialogue between students, community members, and schools.

Taken together, these three recommendations can allow students and teachers to begin a conversation about values that are beneficial in both school and home environments. By raising student consciousness about multiple options, students can experience growth and make informed decisions. Critical thinkers who have reconciled their conflicts with school and their communities will be prepared for a plethora of future opportunities.

Conclusion
The success of students in rural areas is vital to the success of the region, as these students will make up the community of the future. Resistant students in rural areas can be engaged in conversations and critical thinking about their resistance and the factors that prevent them from engaging with school. These students can then develop a voice for change, challenging the dichotomies of higher education and rural values. By voicing their concerns about intersections of school values, home values, and future opportunities, these students can become change agents for their communities. Ultimately, resistant students can be key to the evolution of rural communities.

References