

“WE ARE THE CHANGE WE’VE BEEN WAITING FOR.” A REWRITING OF SELF
THROUGH THE SOCIAL-INTELLECTUAL SPACES OF SERVICE

A Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

“WE ARE THE CHANGE WE’VE BEEN WAITING FOR:” A REWRITING OF SELF THROUGH THE SOCIAL-INTELLECTUAL SPACES OF SERVICE

(MAY 2013)

Jaime L. Winans, M.S.

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This year-long qualitative case study investigates how service-learning may enable self-direction and the development of a critical consciousness for marginalized high school students by exploring the dynamics of service-learning through a theoretical framework of critical theory. A central aim among critical theorists is the empowerment of marginalized groups who are disempowered through the current structure of schooling. Service-learning, an instructional approach that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection, is theorized to counter the oppressive nature of schooling as defined in critical theory; however, little research exists to clarify the implications of service-learning on student empowerment.

The intention of this study was to consider the negotiation of power and knowledge occurring in the open spaces of community that may empower students, redefining their experience of schooling and their identities as learners. By exploring processes of empowerment and the social structures created through service-learning, the study documents students’ self-authorship as they negotiate learning spaces within community. Through this case study, three marginalized, male, urban high school students described their development as learners and as change agents within the context of service and community need.

Data analysis of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents revealed how service-learning offered a transformative experience to culturally non-dominant students which legitimized lived experience and enabled the re-writing of self through the construction of new

social/intellectual spaces. Overall, the findings provide a holistic account of the spaces, relationships, and identities constructed by participants through service-learning. Service-learning positioned participants to encounter social injustices in new ways that facilitated their re-authoring of self and community identities. This widening intellectual space permitted participants' development of their own evolving interpretations and informed actions upon the world for challenging and transforming social and political inequalities. Participants' identities expanded as they critiqued arrangements of power infusing social structures while recognizing the ways their own narratives maintained harmful arrangements of power.

The findings also demonstrate the possibilities for engaging diverse learners whose life experiences and cultural forms of knowledge have been delegitimized through schooling. By providing insight to how empowerment and self-authorship can become central to schooling, this study offers a way to address the opportunity gap which disproportionately affects low-income students of color. Participants' experience offers insight to the pedagogy of service-learning that documents a framework for encountering transformational moments between self, society, and other. Further research exploring the perspectives of marginalized students who are reluctant to engage in service-learning would bring an array of viewpoints to the research purpose.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my son, Jake Robert Solis, born January 18, 2012—

You are my sunshine

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy in which meaningful community service is integrated with instruction and reflection (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008), embodying the ‘learning by doing’ philosophies of John Dewey (Schine, 1999). Pedagogically aligned with experiential education, the practice of service-learning has its roots in the 1960s. Early practitioners, the educators, professors, and community-based leaders who pioneered service-learning, espoused value-driven aims for social justice and change. Empowering both students and communities to inspire change in the world was a major motivation (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). The aims of service-learning and critical theory are complementary, as both are social change and empowerment oriented. Discussion of the relationship between service-learning and social change is common (e.g. Kahne & Westheimer, 1999; Schine, 1999; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999), and researchers frequently reference the work of critical theorists (Yoder Clark, 2009).

Despite these discussions, the potential of service-learning to empower students and communities remains unclear. A common critique of service-learning is that it may further oppress disadvantaged groups by unintentionally reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes and inequitable power relations through a ‘server’ versus ‘served’ dichotomy (Dacheux, 2005; Henry, 2005; Ogden, 1999; Sandmann, Kliwer, Kim, & Omerikwa, 2010; Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). The field has responded to these concerns by establishing standards for quality service-learning practice that promote collaborative, mutually beneficial partnerships with community that build an understanding of diversity (Billig & Weah, 2008). Consensus on quality practice standards is a major advancement for the field which can provide a foundation

for constructing a greater understanding of service-learning's potential to achieve its original aim—student and community empowerment. In-depth qualitative investigations have begun to demonstrate the complexity of processes at work in service-learning, such as student resistance (Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005), identity formation (Jones & Abes, 2004), relationship development (Clayton, Bringle, Senior, Huq, & Morrison, 2010), and critical thinking (Legant, 2010). Continued study is essential to unravel the intricacies of empowerment processes.

The researcher of this study investigated service-learning by relating critical theory to students' experiences. By exploring the dynamics of service-learning through a lens of critical theory, the researcher considered how service-learning may enable self-direction and the development of a critical consciousness for marginalized high school students. A central aim among critical theorists is the empowerment of marginalized groups, who, as culturally non-dominant, are hurt and further disempowered through the current structure of schooling.

Critical theorists contend that the curriculum serves the dominant power in hidden ways by tacitly reinforcing and rewarding middle-class values, attitudes, and behaviors (McLaren, 1989). These hidden, outmoded, and oppressive frameworks marginalize students of non-dominant backgrounds (Kincheloe, 2008). Through their experience of schooling, diverse students may come to realize that success in school may come only “with a rejection of their ethnic and/or class backgrounds and the cultural forms on knowledge that accompany them” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 15). Such a curriculum does not permit students and teachers an intellectual space to explore alternate sources, diverse historical interpretations, or to produce their own knowledge, which may conflict with mainstream thought (Kincheloe, 2008).

The harmful practices that result in marginalization can, however, be countered by providing students with an avenue for knowing that they possess valuable knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008). Freire's (1970/2009) notion of dialogue in which teacher and student work with each other provides an alternative to one person acting upon another, as is often the case in schooling. Freirian dialogue is not only a way of knowing, but is a way of making a difference in the world that enhances community, and enables justice and human flourishing. The process of dialogue along with praxis, which Freire defined as reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it, helps us to acquire a critical awareness to inspire empowerment. Empowerment means not only engaging students in the world around them, but facilitating their development of the courage needed to change social order (McLaren, 1989).

Can service-learning enable a social structure for empowerment? Through this study I sought to gain insight specific to students' experiences of empowerment processes that occur through service-learning. It is widely understood that the achievement gap and high school dropout epidemic disproportionately affect minority students. However, Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Wulsin (2008) reveal that these are the very same students who express the strongest interest in service-learning. The study of service-learning may provide insight to student empowerment and is important due to a need to identify practices that empower students to close achievement gaps and remedy inequalities.

This case study offers a focused, descriptive study linking the areas of service-learning and the empowerment of marginalized students. In order to describe the experiences of marginalized students, there is a need for a qualitative approach that contributes to a deeper understanding of service-learning that incorporates under-represented voices. Their

perspectives will contribute much to the current state of knowledge of not only service-learning but also equality in education.

Service-learning is a broad and active movement affecting learners and communities across the nation. Although service-learning practice emerged during the 1960s, mainly within higher education, education reform and public service initiatives of the 1980s brought active learning strategies and volunteerism to the forefront. These shifts generated a growth in interest in service-learning. Campus Compact was founded in 1985, a critical year for the field, re-sparking campus service and bringing service-learning to mainstream institutions (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). In addition to higher education, service-learning for school aged youth received support through the National and Community Service Act of 1990 as well as the National Service Trust Act of 1993 (Kahne & Westheimer, 1999). Most recently, President Obama demonstrated that service remains a national priority by expanding national service initiatives that will engage millions of Americans in solving local issues through the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (Corporation for National & Community Service, 2010).

Skinner and Chapman's (1999) report on the U.S. Department of Education's National Student Service-Learning and Community Service Survey provided the first national estimates of the prevalence of service-learning in K-12 settings. Their results indicated that overall 32 percent of K-12 public schools reported offering service-learning, including 25 percent of elementary schools, 38 percent of middle schools, and 46 percent of high schools.

Unfortunately, Skinner and Chapman also suggested differences based on socio-economic status of the school: schools with 50 percent or more of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch being less likely to have service-learning opportunities. Furthermore, Bridgeland, Dilulio,

and Wulsin (2008) found that at low-performing schools only eight percent of students reported having access to service-learning classes.

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Wulsin (2008) also determined that a wide gap exists between students who want service-learning opportunities and the number who have access to them, with this gap being largest for minority students. Their nationally representative survey of 807 high school students, including 151 at-risk students, explored students' views of service-learning. The researchers found students to perceive that service-learning can improve their feelings about attending high school, both for students in service-learning programs as well as at-risk students who had not participated in service-learning. Notably, 74 percent of African American, 70 percent of Hispanic, and 64 percent of all students felt that service-learning could have a significant effect on keeping dropouts in school.

Statement of Problem

Service-learning's potential for enabling equality in education continues to emerge as an area to be investigated. A growing body of research documents the academic, civic, social, and personal value of service-learning, especially in higher education. These studies have primarily considered the outcomes experienced by middle class learners. An area that requires further exploration is how service-learning may improve instruction for marginalized, low-income high school students. Although at-risk students have demonstrated an interest in service-learning, it is unknown how such experiences will support their development as learners, as engaged citizens, and as community members. Gaining an understanding of these processes is important due to an increasing trend of unequal access to quality education that disproportionately affects minority students, including rising high school dropout rates (Barton, 2005).

The literature explores the myriad ways of which service-learning students experience social, moral, and intellectual growth and development as they personally encounter such intricacies surrounding social problems. Existing research relies, to a large degree, on students' self-reports, while little attention has been given to the processes students engage in as they undertake this work. Fewer studies still consider the experiences of high school students. To understand students' experience as change agents and the empowering processes they engage in, further exploration is required. I examined students' experiences of empowerment through service-learning as well as the self-authorship of students as they critically re-write social spaces of community.

Purpose of Study

The intention of this qualitative case study was to relate students' experience of service-learning to critical theory. The aim was to explore the role of service-learning on the ways in which three marginalized, male, urban high school students empowered themselves and their learning practices. To gain insight to students' experiences of service-learning, the following questions guided the study:

1. How do three male, marginalized, urban high school students empower themselves through participating in service-learning?
2. How do three male, marginalized, urban high school students author themselves through service-learning experiences?

Interactions with community spaces can shift the power relations between teachers and students that may oppress the disadvantaged, non-dominant student. In the open spaces of community, the negotiation of power and knowledge may empower students, redefining their experience of schooling and their identities as learners. Examining students' actions, this study was not only

concerned with empowerment, but also considered the possibilities for engaging diverse learners whose life experiences and cultural forms of knowledge have not been legitimated by schooling.

This study was concerned with empowerment as described in critical theory. Empowerment means not only engaging students in the world around them, but facilitating their development of the courage needed to change social order (McLaren, 1989). Through service-learning, students intellectually engaged in “building new social spaces” (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995, p. 8). These spaces, which may physically lie outside the school borders, are the intellectual ground that students cross over to re-conceptualize the relationship of self, society, and other (Giroux, 2005; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). The re-authoring of these relationships, directed by students, speaks to Freire’s (2009) efforts to reshape the world through such transformative actions that occurs through liberation and empowerment. By exploring processes of empowerment and the social structures created through service-learning, which may empower, or perhaps further oppress students, the study sought to understand students’ self-authorship as they negotiate learning spaces within community. These spaces have the potential to position students to encounter social injustices in new ways that facilitate students’ re-authoring of self and community identities.

Theoretical Framework

I approached this investigation with a theoretical framework of critical theory. Research from a critical theory standpoint, as described by Kincheloe (2008), explicitly seeks to construct information that is useful in the struggle against oppression and suffering. With this critical perspective, I aimed not only to describe experiences of service-learning, but espoused a personal commitment to explore and initiate change for marginalized students (Eisenhart, 2006).

This approach requires understanding multiple contexts, building trusting relationships with research participants, and also developing concrete ways to address the concerns of diverse groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Importance of Study

It is theorized that service-learning offers pedagogies that counter the oppressive nature of schooling as defined in critical theory. Simonet (2008) proposes that service-learning's engaged learning across dynamic community contexts provides the purpose, relevance, meaning, and social engagement needed to keep students in school and on track to graduate. Student perspectives echo his claim. To keep students in school, youth who have dropped out explain that schools must improve the quality of instruction, school climate, student-teacher relationships, and parental involvement (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Additionally, students also suggest that service-learning could help to retain students who are at risk of dropping out (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008).

Schooling must permit new spaces, relationships, and identities (Giroux, 2005). However, a holistic account of the spaces, relationships, and identities constructed by marginalized high school students through service-learning is lacking from the literature. Presently, no other research has examined marginalized high school students' experiences of service-learning through a lens of critical theory. Therefore, the implications of service-learning on student empowerment remain unclear. Existing research does however, provide a preliminary understanding of practices that underscore students' potential for empowerment and self-authorship.

Gaining an understanding of these processes is important due to an increasing trend of unequal access to quality education that disproportionately affects minority students, including

rising high school dropout rates. The research also aims to explore the possibilities for engaging diverse learners whose life experiences and cultural forms of knowledge have not been legitimated by schooling. Such research is important due to an increasing trend of inequality in schooling. This study aims to contribute to the understanding of pedagogical methods for remedying educational inequalities that may empower culturally non-dominant, marginalized students.

Methods Used in this Study

To explore service-learning from the perspectives of learners, I employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth view of the processes three marginalized, male, urban high school students engaged in as they participated in service-learning. Qualitative inquiry aims to understand the human experience (Stake, 1995). Qualitative methods were used in this study to develop a deep understanding of what processes occur when high school students participate in service-learning. A qualitative case study research design was chosen to facilitate an exploration through not only my perspective, “but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). Researchers aligned with the qualitative tradition view particularities of individuals and contexts as vital to understanding, and emphasize personal interpretation, while acknowledging the holistic nature of phenomena (Stake, 1995). It is through this personal involvement that qualitative approaches reveal unexpected processes and outcomes (Eisenhart, 2006).

Case study is regarded as a method for gaining insight to a specific situation through an up-close and firsthand understanding (Yin, 2006). In this case study, I was a participant observer as I examined the processes that service-learning students engaged in. The research was conducted at an all male, urban charter high school located in a school district that struggles

with high dropout rates. Purposeful sampling was utilized to intentionally choose participants to deepen understanding of the concepts central to the research purpose (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Data collection methods employed included participant observations, interviews, and collecting documents including the researcher's journal. These methods yielded three data sources: expanded field notes, interview transcripts, and documents.

Definition of Terms

Based on the literature presented in chapter two, I operationalize the definitions of terms utilized throughout the study.

Critical theory: A philosophy of education based on a social and educational vision of justice and equality, that acknowledges the political inscriptions hidden within education, is committed to alleviating the suffering caused by discrimination and poverty, and confronts the “mechanisms of social and educational stratification that hurt socially, linguistically, and economically marginalized students” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 15).

Culture: “A set of practices, ideologies, and values from which different groups draw to make sense of the world” (McLaren, 1989, p. 171).

Cultural capital: The language forms, abilities, prior knowledge, and values that are unequally distributed in society. Schools select for such attributes, favoring students who already have the social and linguistic competencies valued in middle class culture, and thereby reproduce unequal distributions of power (Apple, 1990).

Empowerment: The process through which students learn to transform social order by critiquing aspects of the status quo that support inequitable relations while at the same time legitimizing and embracing their own history, language, and cultural traditions (McLaren, 1989).

Ideology: The often unacknowledged set of ideas, values, commitments, cultural beliefs, and norms informing one's world view which become problematic as they serve the interests of the dominant class and tacitly infuse schooling (Apple, 1990).

Lived experience: The prior knowledge, informed by daily interactions, that students bring to school which often conflicts with the curriculum and is therefore delegitimized through schooling (McLaren, 1989).

Marginalized: The culturally non-dominant student who is oppressed by schooling structures that silence and exclude diverse voices (Kincheloe, 2008).

Self-authorship: A process of constructing a self-directed identity based on the creation of knowledge of oneself in relation to one's reading of the social world (Baxter Magolda, 2000).

Service-learning: A pedagogy that aims to empower both students and communities to inspire for social justice and change by joining "two complex concepts: community action, the "service," and efforts to learn from that action and connect what is learned to existing knowledge, the "learning" (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999, p. 2).

Summary

The study presented here intends to illuminate the potential for student empowerment through service-learning. Chapter two presents the relevant literature from both the critical theory and service-learning fields. I incorporate a discussion of the interactions of these two areas to point towards a possible pedagogy for empowerment. Research methodology is the focus of the third chapter. The research design, rationale for the qualitative case study, and theoretical framework are further explained, along with the particulars of data collection, analysis, and the research site. Findings are detailed in chapter four. This includes an in-depth look at the service-learning curriculum, research participants, and the major findings that

emerged through cross case analysis. Finally, chapter five consists of conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Despite decades of intensifying education reform, the degree of inequality present in our educational system has increased, remaining a critical flaw of schooling in the United States. Discussion of the achievement gap and the disparities of the educational experience for diverse children are widely documented. Is service-learning a way to address these inequalities, not only by engaging diverse learners, but also through empowering them as change agents in their communities?

While appropriately the focus of much recent attention, the discussion of educational inequality originates in the study of critical theory. Critical theorists have examined the oppressive forces at work in society that implicitly support structures that enable inequalities. In their view, education consists of mechanisms of social and educational stratification that hurt marginalized students. Power is tacitly arranged within these structures to silence and exclude diverse voices. Through their experience of schooling, diverse students may come to realize that success in school may come only through rejecting their ethnic and class backgrounds as well as their cultural forms of knowledge.

This literature review focuses on educational inequalities and service-learning, their interactions, and how they relate to the purpose of this study. The first section introduces service-learning pedagogy, traces its origins to progressive theorists, and addresses the strengths and challenges of the field. The second section contextualizes educational inequalities in critical theory, focusing on the oppressive nature of schooling that may exist through social structures, and the potential for student empowerment. The banking model of education is discussed along with its implications for power, resistance, and the reproduction of social

inequalities. The third section considers the interactions of service-learning and critical theory in the social structures of schooling and how they may be integrated to address educational inequalities. Research topics are more closely examined in this section which reviews previous research and identifies the need for the present study. This final section also connects the present study to the aims of critical theory. The discussion begins with an analysis of service-learning pedagogy.

Service-Learning

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy in which meaningful community service is integrated with instruction and reflection (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2008), embodying the ‘learning by doing’ philosophies of John Dewey (Schine, 1999). In *The Child and the Curriculum*, Dewey (1990) contended that the impersonal, specialized, and abstract nature of the curriculum is in direct opposition to the personal, practical, and emotional worlds of children. Dewey’s philosophy recognized the child’s own experience as fundamental:

If the subject-matter of the lessons be such as to have an appropriate place within the expanding consciousness of the child, if it grows out of his own past doings, thinkings, and sufferings, and grows into application in further achievements and receptivities, then no device or trick of method has to be resorted to in order to enlist ‘interest.’ (p. 205)

Such are the aims of service-learning. By aligning with students own experiences, culture, and interests, service-learning intends to intrinsically capture students cognitively, behaviorally, socially, and emotionally (Simonet, 2008).

Dewey’s ideas informed progressivism, and although service-learning did not emerge until the Civil Rights Era, its practices are theoretically aligned with this movement.

Progressivism aims to facilitate discovery and self-directed learning by the student through

active engagement. Progressivism supports students' work on projects that express student purposes and that integrate the disciplines around socially relevant themes. A concern for "promoting values of community, cooperation, tolerance, justice and democratic equality" (Labaree, 2005, p. 277) is also central. Here too, service-learning is aligned with progressive ideals, as students and schools undertake work in socially relevant areas of community need. In addition to its interdisciplinary nature, service-learning also blends various social movements with experiential education, addressing important social needs while simultaneously undertaking an active process of learning and reflection (Oden & Casey, 2007).

Charity or change debate. Service-learning "is unavoidably political" (Kahne & Westheimer, 1999, p. 34). Service-learning, deceptively simple on the surface, is tangled with ideological questions. For example: "who decides what is community service?" (Spring, 2010, p. 11). Our values, often hidden and un-questioned, inform how we implement service-learning. There are differing motivations informing the pedagogy—some, devoting minimal attention to the larger oppressive forces at work in society, choose to focus on the performance of civic duty, while others explicitly engage in a critical analysis of the causes of social problems, such as homelessness or teen age pregnancy (Kahne & Westheimer, 1999). Discussion of these aims is ongoing in the field. Some contend that social change is essential to the pedagogy, seeking to advance service-learning as an approach for encountering privilege and inequity (e.g. Boyle-Baise, 2002; King, 2004; Niesz, 2008). Others omit ideological considerations from their frameworks for service-learning (e.g. Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun, 2007).

According to Kahne and Westheimer (1999), these two orientations can be traced through historical debates over curriculum. One approach emphasizes social change, and is

based on transformative potential that was recognized by Dewey and others. Here, the focus is on enabling students' recognition of their abilities to respond to social injustices. Kahne and Westheimer (1999) explain that for Dewey, this was essential to democratic education. Based in a Deweyian approach, they promote the value of service-learning as an act through which critical thought is developed and applied to solve authentic problems. This orientation explicitly embraces a resolve to develop students' values and beliefs around social change. However, Kahne and Westheimer (1999) continued, the dominant discourse in service-learning practice prioritizes "charity, not change" (p. 28).

Ogden (1999), echoing these concerns, explained: "implicit in the concept of service is an element of hierarchy" (p. 190), resulting in an imbalance between the one who gives and the one who receives. Clearly, a substantial critique of service-learning challenges the traditional server and served dichotomy (Dacheux, 2005; Henry, 2005; Ogden, 1999) and acknowledges the complex power relations at work in service-learning (Sandmann, Kliwer, Kim, & Omerikwa, 2010). Dacheux (2005) explained this problem from her own standpoint as a "server" in this dichotomy:

Then I reflected on how I felt when I had been the subject in service-learning projects. While in high school, I had participated in a program designed to help high-achieving, low-income students make it to college. I remembered hating the way that the college student "servers" tried to analyze us and figure out what was wrong with us so they could "fix" it. It was then that I realized what had prevented me from connecting with the students in my own service-learning project: somewhere along the way I had bought into the notion that these kids (poor, brown, and/or urban youths) were somehow "wrong" and needed me as the now educated college students to raise them up. I had

placed them and myself into a binary of “served” and “server” and by doing so assumed them to be somehow lacking in comparison. There was a distance between myself and these kids I so desperately wanted to help and that distance was created by the very fact that I thought they needed *help*. In order to develop my own new sense of identity as a college student I had formed this binary, a binary driven by a sense of superiority. It was as if I could only say who I was if I could also say who I was better than. (p. 69)

When power and privilege go unacknowledged, exploitive relationships are developed through service-learning (Clayton, Bringle, Senior, Huq, & Morrison, 2010). Such arrangements use the community as a laboratory for students to experiment in, rather than as an equal partner with mutually beneficial outcomes towards community development (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999).

Service-learning, like “citizenship in a democratic community, requires more than kindness and decency; it requires engagement in complex social and institutional endeavors” (Kahne & Westheimer, 1999, p. 34). Service-learning, as a way of engaging democratic society, must intentionally aim for social justice. Lack of explicit encounters with social issues reproduce dominant, hegemonic views of the community students intend to help. Boyle-Baise (2002) offers powerful practices through which service-learning sites “demonstrate positive regard for cultural diversity” (p. 319), by being explicit about social justice goals, and developing collaborative community partnerships. Importantly, newly proposed models of service-learning explicitly aim for social change (Billig & Weah, 2008).

Defining service-learning. The range of motivations for using this method have caused defining service-learning to be problematic. Additionally, two complex processes, service and learning, are not easily clarified. While one all-inclusive definition for service-learning does not incorporate the multiple practices within this field, Stanton, Giles, and Cruz (1999) offer

simply: “Service-learning joins two complex concepts: community action, the “service,” and efforts to learn from that action and connect what is learned to existing knowledge, the “learning” (p. 2).

The ambiguity of service-learning can also be traced to the variety in pedagogical practices. These may focus more heavily of the act of service, i.e. community service, to highly reflective practices that focus more heavily on the learning about social issues and inequalities (Terry & Bohnenberger, 2004). Some argue that community service is deficient in learning, and therefore should not be included as a service-learning approach (e.g. Eyler & Giles, 1999). Their perspective is supported by research which has identified practices that optimize growth and learning.

Eyler and Giles’ (1999) comparison of an array of service-learning programs found that: “The quality of service-learning, including application, opportunities for structured reflection, and diversity and community voice, was a predictor of reports of critical thinking, ability to see consequences of actions, issue identification, and openness to new ideas” (p. 127). Other researchers comparing programs with such high quality attributes to those without, have noted more greatly impacted ethical capacities, awareness, sociomoral development (Leming, 2001), civic engagement (Morgan & Streb, 2001), critical thinking capabilities, and deepened perspectives on social issues (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Additionally, the practice of reflection in conjunction with service activities through in-class discussion and writing activities is widely demonstrated to positively impact desirable learning outcomes (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Levesque-Bristol, Knapp & Fisher, 2010).

A comprehensive review of research supported service-learning principles is provided by Billig and Weah’s (2008) *National K–12 Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice*.

Their charge was to transform vague areas of practice into “clear, measurable, and actionable” (p. 9) standards to assist practitioners “in achieving the larger goals of service-learning: educational improvement, community development, and social change” (p. 12). The eight standards specify practices for meaningful service, duration and intensity, integration into the curriculum, reflection, understanding of diversity, collaborative partnerships, progress monitoring, and youth voice throughout planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning.

Billig and Weah’s (2008) standards not only help to establish consistency in developing an understanding of service-learning, but also do much to clarify the ideological frameworks underlying service-learning approaches. By describing the characteristics of collaborative partnerships, the standards support the construction of mutually beneficial relationships with community, within which students can work towards social change. The standards also highlight reflection as an avenue for student voice and the construction of their own interpretations of social issues. Billig and Weah (2008) have largely clarified the ambiguities around the pedagogy. Their framework will not only assist practitioners, but will also be helpful in advancing a research agenda for the field.

However, Furco (2001) found that the outcomes of service programs tend to be more dependent on the unique contexts and interactions that occur between students, service activities, and communities than predetermined goals. Similarly, Cress (2005) offers that service-learning is about what happens when students “grapple with the essence of what it means to be a learner, a citizen, and a community member” (p. 1). It is important, then, that a vision of service-learning incorporates this dynamic, experiential nature. Cress (2005) provides a “Learning-through-Serving Model” (p. 8) (Figure 1) of service-learning which exhibits the

interactions that define service-learning. The model is helpful in understanding how service-learning plays out in practice by showing the interdependent ways that course content is integrated with first hand student experience in community.

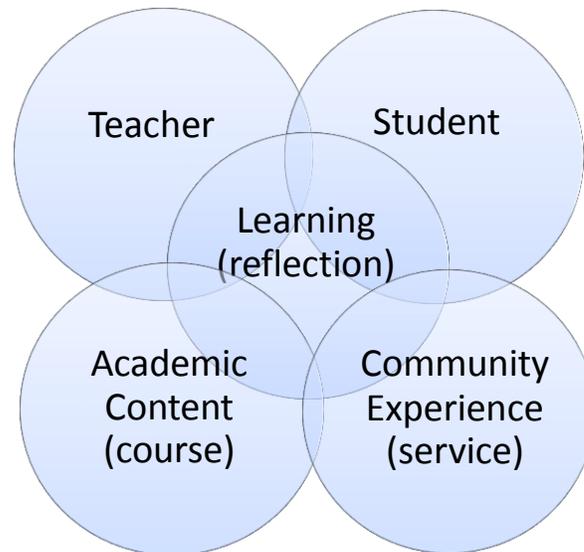


Figure 1. The Learning-through-Serving Model (Cress, 2005, p. 8)

Aiming to support the academic, social, and emotional growth of students, “service-learning provides meaningful ways for students, teachers, administrators, and community agencies and members to move together with deliberate thought and action toward a common purpose that has mutual benefits” (Kaye, 2004, p. 2). Such processes are inherently difficult to narrowly define. However, it is exactly such complexities and ambiguities that position students to reconceive social spaces (Butin, 2005). The present study strives for a balanced vision of service-learning that incorporates research based quality indicators, an understanding of the dynamics of complex social interactions, as well as an intentional aim for social justice and change.

Critical Theory

Service-learning has the potential to exemplify the ideals of critical theory while providing greater insight to processes for student empowerment, self-authorship, and the development of a critical consciousness (Niesz, 2008). Critical theorists such as Freire (1970, 2009), McLaren (1989), Kincheloe (2008), and others have established the grounds for understanding the oppressive nature of schooling structures, while arguing for pedagogies of empowerment and liberation. As a social structure laden with tacit dimensions of power, schools may empower or oppress. Service-learning, too, positions students in the midst of complex power relations. Along the aims of critical theory, service-learning may intentionally strive for empowerment by engaging students as self-directed social agents who re-write their understanding of local social problems and inequalities (Niesz, 2008). However, pedagogies for empowerment are far from being the dominant paradigm in schooling.

Paulo Freire (2009) argued: “any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (p. 85). Schooling to a large degree relies on harmful and oppressive pedagogies in which students, and also teachers, are reduced to objects. Freire’s (1970, 2009) critical theory is based in his opposition to the banking model of schooling which treats the student as an object to which knowledge is transferred. Since Freire’s writings, American education has become increasingly politicized. Currently, the banking model continues to dominate schooling. Pinar (2004) views the current state of the field of education as a “nightmare” (p. xii) of anti-intellectualism and political subjugation in which control of the curriculum has been rationalized through claims of accountability. Teachers have lost direction of the curriculum,

demoting both students and teachers from knowledge producers to rote drill and skill workers (Pinar, 2004). In response, especially to recent (un)developments, critical education deals not only with questions of schooling, curriculum, and educational policy, but views these concerns through a framework for social justice and human possibility (Kincheloe, 2008).

In direct opposition to the banking model paradigm, critical theory aims to enable students to re-write the relationships between self and society while cultivating a political imagination (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). According to Butin (2005), the service-learning ideal challenges the banking model of education. However, service-learning may also be implemented through the banking model, or it may place students as knowledge producers. Niesz (2006, 2008) draws attention to the role of teacher ideologies as limiting factors in the construction of students' social-political imaginations. She detailed how school culture and teacher ideologies led to students' reproduction of dominant, hegemonic views of the "problems of their low-income urban community as problems of individuals" (p. 329). Teacher subjectivities are key to understanding how critical theories become practice in everyday school life (Niesz, 2006). Therefore, as in all pedagogies, the ideologies embedded in service-learning must be examined and made explicit.

Oppression in schooling. Fine (1991) points out that "public schools have never been designed to benefit low-income students of color" (p. xi). As demonstrated throughout history, schools have served to preserve dominant ideologies that are harmful to students and humanity (Spring, 2010). Although education is touted as "the glorious equalizer of our free society" (McLaren, 1989, p. 223) that enables students to transcend their socio-economic status, we must acknowledge the myth of equal opportunity which shapes our worldview. Apple (1990)

explains that as schools distribute cultural capital to more powerful groups, social inequalities are reproduced.

The ways which schools oppress are intricately woven into teacher ideologies (McLaren, 1989). According to Kincheloe (2008), the curriculum serves the dominant power in hidden ways because we remain unconscious of embedded political ideologies. When education claims neutrality, it supports the existing, dominant structure of power (Kincheloe, 2008). Kincheloe (2008) reminds us that intelligence is politically inscribed and constructed within a nexus of power, concluding that “the closer a student operates in relation to dominant power, the more likely she is to be labeled intelligent” (p. 167).

Power. Critical theory acknowledges that knowledge construction is deeply rooted in power relations, in which there is no pure insight, since “we do not stand before the social world; we live in the midst of it” (McLaren, 1989, p.169). School borders “constrains relations of power” which influence cognitive functioning as well as the inscription of power in the “body, culture, space, subjectivity” (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995, p. 5). Implicit within school borders are forms of power that establish oppressive relationships of us/them, dichotomizing the school and student (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995).

Power relations are clearly visible through Fine’s (1991) depiction of an inner city, “predominantly African-American and Latino, lower-income and working class” (p. 13-14) high school. She details how schooling routinely silenced students’ voices, delegitimizing their knowledge and experiences through teacher-centered classroom interactions, and stifled their resistance to unequal power through discipline and exclusion. Fine’s account poignantly echoes Freire’s (1970/2009) critique of the “banking” concept of education. The banking model views the student as an empty account to be filled by the teacher. Freire opposed this model’s attempts

to control thinking, action, and inhibit creative power. He contended: “Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not *with* the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator” (p. 75). The power relations implicit within the banking approach oppress by separating students from knowledge. However, few teachers are aware that their ‘neutral’ pedagogies are laced with harmful power arrangements.

Through such arrangements, McLaren (1989) portrays schools as zones of transactions and struggle between subordinate groups and the dominant ideology. Additionally, within schools “the subordinate class actively subscribes to many of the values and objectives of the dominant class without being aware of the source of those values or the interests which inform them” (p. 174). The dominant culture, through this dynamic of hegemonic control, dominates subordinate groups through consensual social practices and structures. In schooling, hegemony is sustained through the myth of individual achievement and its view of academic failure as a personal inadequacy. As a result, the oppressed blame themselves for structural school failure and unknowingly contribute to their own oppression (McLaren, 1989). Therefore, critical theory must address both the “problem of the oppressed consciousness and the oppressor consciousness” (Freire, 2009, p. 55).

Resistance. Fine (1991) demonstrates how schooling delegitimizes the lived experiences of students. In response, as detailed by both Fine (1991) and McLaren (1989), students engage in a process of resistance to school culture. McLaren (1989) argues that resistance in schools is an effort of the students to bring their culture to the classroom, since the culture of the classroom is infused with a cultural capital to which they have little access:

For low-track students, time in school may be more a burden than an asset. Such students often view knowledge as unrelated to their lives and instruction as an assault on their time. School becomes a place for enduring “dead time” rather than using it in the interests of self and social empowerment. If such students learn anything, it is *in spite of* the degradation they endure. (p. 10)

Resistance to classroom instruction represents the resolve of students to retain their street identities (McLaren, 1989). Kincheloe (2008) attends to the interactions of culture, race, and power infusing students’ resistance. He argues that: “In a racial context, oftentimes the notion of saving students involves a paternalistic effort to help them become more culturally white” (p. 25). Through their experience of schooling, students may come to realize that success in school may require a rejection of their ethnicities and cultural ways of knowing (Kincheloe, 2008). Conversely, resistance provides an avenue for legitimizing culture and race (Kincheloe, 2008).

Exclusion. The widening achievement gap between dominant and non-dominant students is extensively documented. In response, Fine (1991) questions: How can equal access to educational resources, in an educational system that promises equal opportunity for all, result in unequal educational achievement? To critical theorists, the unequal outcomes experienced by non-dominant students, is an indication of the oppressive forces at work in schooling. Fine (1991) persists “the crudest indicator of unequal educational outcomes” (p. 21) are high school dropout rates. In high schools, a central issue is the exclusion, or drop out, of disproportionately minority, poor students from public education. The rate at which students are leaving schools is considered to be a “silent epidemic” (p. 1) plaguing our nation (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Indeed, recent reports of a 47 percent national graduation rate for African American boys present a dire picture of schooling today (Holzman, 2010).

Fine (1991) describes ‘dropping out,’ as opposed to ‘staying in,’ as a manifestation of school policies and practices that marginalize. Challenging traditional thinking, Fine shares a school office aides’ remark: “I don’t know why they call them dropouts, when we make them go” (p. 63). Her study illuminates the hidden practices and silenced voices that are the experience of dropping out in a school where 66 percent did not graduate. Fine describes their exit:

When they went, both educators and many youths themselves viewed these events as individual “choices” or due to personal inadequacies. Perhaps this is the most compelling consequence of institutionalized silencing. When the policies and practices of purging are rendered invisible, no one but the adolescent is held to blame. (p. 82)

Schooling pushes students out through a dangerous, oppressive manipulation of power. Obtaining an accurate depiction of dropout rates remains a substantial obstacle in the struggle against exclusion. Presently, “there are too many ways to calculate graduation and dropout rates that disguise the problem” (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006, p. vi). High school completion rates reported by States are inaccurate, and the problem is compounded under current federal legislation, the No Child Left Behind Act, which may unintentionally encourage schools to push out low-performing students (Barton, 2005).

Through the dialectical nature of critical theory, we must begin to acknowledge that underachievement of disadvantaged students is not representative of individual failure; it is a much larger phenomenon of economic and social constructs (McLaren, 1989). The failure of inner-city education is not in the attitudes of the poor, but in the failure of society to change oppressive socio-economic structures, resulting from the interactive context between individual and society (McLaren, 1989).

Empowerment. Just as schools tacitly arrange power in structures that oppress, they also have the potential to liberate and empower. Kincheloe (2008) contends that the least empowered our students “need to be respected and viewed as experts in their interest areas, and inspired with the impassioned spirit to use education to do good things in the world” (p. 8). Empowerment means not only engaging students in the world around them, but facilitating their development of the courage needed to change social order (McLaren, 1989). Students need to encounter opportunities for challenging and transforming social and political inequalities (Giroux, 2005). McLaren and Giarelli (1995) explain that reclaiming power and identity will require students to re-write the relationships between self and society while cultivating a political imagination.

Oppression in schooling must be countered by providing students an avenue for knowing that they possess valuable knowledge (Kincheloe, 2008). Freire (2005) persuades teachers to experience “a rich moment of learning in their teaching” (p. 32) through dialogue. To do so, the notions of teacher and student need to incorporate reciprocity, with both simultaneously sharing roles of learning and teaching (Freire, 2009). The teacher, Freire offered, must be willing to relearn. His vision of dialogue with respect, does not involve one person acting on another, but rather people working with each other. Fine (1991) reveals rare moments of reciprocity in which students and teachers share a discussion that “embodied the energy of community and sense of intellectual safety” (p. 59). As teachers invite students’ lives into classroom discourse, they interrupt the institutional silencing of schooling (Fine, 1991). In this sense, dialogue isn't just a way of knowing, but is a way to change the world by building communities that enable justice and human flourishing (Freire, 2009).

Giroux (2005) calls for the creation of pedagogical structures in which students become “border crossers” (p. 20). Giroux’s concept of borderlands positions knowledge, social relations, and discourses as socially constructed manifestations of power. As border crossers, students can explore and critique the ways power inscribes social situations (Giroux, 2005). This will position students to make judgments about social practices and the construction of power that “structure inequalities around racism, sexism, homophobia, violence, exclusion, and other forms of oppression” (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995, p. 5). As they do so, students will construct new social spaces that are built through an understanding of the multiplicity of truths (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995).

Giroux (2005) explains the potential of the border, an intellectual space in which students can create new knowledge and identify the structures that oppress:

Knowledge forms emanating from the margins can be used to redefine the complex, multiple, heterogeneous realities that constitute those relations of difference that make up the experiences of students who often find it impossible to define their identities through the cultural and political codes that characterize the dominant culture. (p. 24)

Empowerment will involve creating new spaces for knowledge production and identity formation (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). Placing students in diverse contexts engages their critical social imagination (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). As borders are “challenged, crossed, and refigured...students rewrite their own histories, identities, and learning possibilities” (Giroux, 2005, p. 22).

Interactions

The empowerment of students as defined in critical theory must involve dialogue and border crossing: “New spaces, relationships, and identities have to be created that allow us to

move across borders, to engage difference and otherness as part of a discourse of justice, social engagement, and democratic struggle” (Giroux, 2005, p. 75). Can service-learning engage students as border crossers? By reviewing the existing literature on service-learning, this section seeks to establish a foundation for the present study by exploring how service-learning may offer pedagogies of empowerment.

Service-learning is a postmodern pedagogy according to Butin (2005) in that “it is a pedagogy immersed in the complexities and ambiguities of how we come to make sense of ourselves and the world around us” (p. 98). The literature explores the myriad ways which service-learning students experience social, moral, and intellectual growth and development as they personally encounter such intricacies surrounding social problems. Existing research relies, to a large degree, on students’ self-reports, while little attention has been given to the processes students engage in as they undertake this work. Fewer studies still consider the experiences of high school students. To understand students’ experience as change agents and the empowering processes they engage in, further exploration is required. This research will examine students’ experiences of empowerment through service-learning as well as the self-authorship of students as they critically re-write social spaces of community.

It is theorized that service-learning offers pedagogies that counter the oppressive nature of schooling as defined in critical theory, including the practices of silencing and exclusion detailed by Fine (1991). Simonet (2008) proposes that service-learning’s engaged learning across dynamic community contexts provides the purpose, relevance, meaning, and social engagement needed to keep students in school and on track to graduate. Student perspectives echo his claim. To keep students in school, youth who have dropped out explain that schools must improve the quality of instruction, school climate, student-teacher relationships, and

parental involvement (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Additionally, on Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Wulsin's (2008) nationally representative survey, 74 percent of African American, 70 percent of Latino, and 64 percent of all student respondents reported a belief that service-learning could have a big effect on keeping dropouts in school.

As Giroux (2005) maintains, schooling must permit new spaces, relationships, and identities. However, a holistic account of the spaces, relationships, and identities constructed by marginalized high school students through service-learning is lacking from the literature. Presently, no research examines marginalized high school students' experiences of service-learning through a lens of critical theory. Therefore, the implications of service-learning on student empowerment remain unclear. Existing research does however, provide a preliminary understanding of practices that underscore students' potential for empowerment and self-authorship. An exploration of the simultaneously intellectual and social spaces of service-learning that positions students as knowledge producers and change agents is the focus of this section.

Relevancy. An aim of service-learning is to construct a new place in which new ways of learning emerge in a shared territory, shifting the dynamics of learning space and power (Clark & Young, 2005). By placing the student and community central within knowledge development related to remedying real, local issues, students report an enhanced sense of relevancy to their academic work. It is well documented that, according to college students, service-learning experiences are richer and more relevant than methods used in traditional classes (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kovarik, 2010; Prentice & Robinson, 2010).

Across numerous programs, Eyler and Giles (1999) found that at the college level, service-learning students had a deeper and more complex understanding of the issues they were

studying and had more confidence in applying what they learned: “service made the subject matter come to life and put them inside the subject matter rather than outside, as abstract, disinterested observers” (p. 70). Students in these programs report enhanced learning as the result of deeper engagement and intrinsic curiosity that developed due to genuine experiences in their community. Students describe a greater ability to recall and apply information learned through service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Prentice & Robinson, 2010), and that they applied academic content in a meaningful way (Kovarik, 2010). Students also express an increased retention of academic content because, as they explained, of experiences that had real-life consequences (Prentice & Robinson, 2010).

Service-learning impacts students’ thinking about social issues, helping them to realize the complexity and multidimensionality of social problems (Batchelder & Root, 1994). Encountering the complexities involved in working on relevant social problems may engage and develop students’ critical thinking capacities (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Prentice & Robinson, 2010). Legant (2010) described an elementary service-learning classroom as a “rich environment for decision making and critical thinking.” Legant (2010) highlighted three elements of critical thinking that were evident in the service-learning project: seeking clarity, comparing and contrasting, and evaluating options.

At the college level, student reports also indicate increases in reasoning, logic, leadership, and confidence (Prentice & Robinson, 2010) as well as overall gains in a sense of academic achievement (Kovarik, 2010; Prentice & Robinson, 2010). Astin and Sax (1998) found service-learning to support an increase in the amount of time dedicated to academic work and number of contacts with faculty. Furco (2001) explains that students’ increased engagement is due to their affinity for the issues addressed through their service experiences.

Students' positive perceptions of academic growth through service-learning have been reiterated by college faculty. Faculty respondents to Prentice and Robinson's (2010) survey affirmed that service-learning enhanced learning by engaging students in a variety of real, rigorous experiences that could not be replicated in the classroom. Faculty also expressed that service-learning uniquely positioned students to transfer and apply academic knowledge to a real world situation, which they reported increased student engagement.

It has been established that for college students, learning is enhanced by an increased sense of relevancy and meaning in their academic work. While service-learning is currently employed by approximately 46% of all high schools in the United States (Skinner & Chapman, 1999), little is known about how learning occurs for these students. What remains unclear is if high school students will agree with college students' claims of advanced relevancy and engagement. Initial findings indicate that service-learning may support high school students' development of positive feelings towards attending school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008). Additionally, reports presenting the perspectives of dropouts suggest that opportunities for real-world learning may have encouraged them to complete high school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

Interestingly, of K-12 schools with service-learning opportunities, few schools report academic reasons for utilizing this approach. Instead, schools commonly convey aims for community and relationship development (Skinner & Chapman, 1999). However, the potential interdependence of academic learning and community relationships should not be overlooked. As Eyler and Giles (1999) reported, students overwhelmingly explain that service-learning is a powerful experience based in personal relationships and in doing work that creates change in people's lives, which motivates their learning.

Relationships. Service-learning is commonly regarded for its potential to unify students, schools, and communities, by forging relationships across socio-economic boundaries. Service-learning nurtures partnerships between students and the community, as well as among students and between students and teachers (Furco, 2001). In fact, the most frequently cited motivations reported by school administrators for encouraging student involvement in service-learning focused on relationship development among students, the school, and the community (Skinner & Chapman, 1999). Students, teachers, and community organizations have reported that service activities create community bonds, positioning students to develop a sense of belonging, and establish new relationships (Furco, 2001). College professors also report aims for community building through service-learning pedagogy (e.g. Boyle-Baise, 2002). Astin and Sax (1998) asked college freshman at 42 institutions why they chose to enroll in service-learning courses; students resoundingly indicated a motivation to help others by reaching out to community. The relationships developed through service-learning are one of greatest perceived benefits. However, constructing strong, positive community relations can be a challenge for schools (Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun, 2007).

Service-learning relationships are complex and with wide reaching implications for student growth, social change, and community development. Bringle, Clayton, and Price (2009) developed a framework for exploring relationships created through civic engagement. Relationships cross the boundaries existing between students, community organizations, faculty, campus administrators, and community residents. Among these five constituencies, 10 dyadic relationships form social networks. Bringle, Clayton, and Price (2009) explain:

Such interactions involve complex and dynamic relationships that are necessarily subject to re-negotiation over time and that hold the potential to catalyze significant growth for the participants as well as substantial new work and new knowledge production. (p. 2)

Expanding on this framework, Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, and Morrison (2010) explored in-depth the qualities of these relationships, which they identified along a continuum ranging from exploitive, to transactional, to transformational based on dimensions of closeness, equity, and integrity. Transformational relationships demonstrate a merger of purpose, identity, and outcome (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009). Service-learning, through these relationships can enable collective problem solving and shared knowledge production (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009).

However, relationships in service-learning are not necessarily mutually beneficial and collaborative (Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009). Furco (2001) highlighted an essential function in student-community relations: the most passionate statements about service experiences tend to come from students who felt that they were trusted, respected, and valued at their service sites. Conversely, Furco (2001) continued, service experiences lacking leadership opportunities were regarded as meaningless by students. Swaminathan (2005) also demonstrates how disempowering community relations can negatively impact students' experience of service-learning. The research suggests that the power structure of the relationships created through service-learning are essential. In the most empowering service-learning programs, reciprocity is established between constituents (Furco, 2001). It is also important that adults espouse a willingness to learn from students (Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun, 2007).

Service-learning may also restructure student-teacher relations. Prentice and Robinson (2010) described the benefits faculty perceived from teaching through service: "My relationship

is better with my students. I get to know them better. I get to work with them on a closer level. And so you really become a mentor for them as they learn these life skills” (p. 11). Even after controlling for student characteristics, Astin and Sax (1998) found service-learning students to demonstrate statistically significant increased contacts with faculty compared to non-service students. By working closely together, sometimes even as peers, more personal relationships are developed between students and teachers (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler, Bradley, Goldzweig, Schlundt, & Juarez, 2010; Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Improved relations between students and teachers have vital implications for enhancing school climate. Nelson and Stroink (2010) found students’ sense of community belonging to significantly increase after their participation in service-learning. Teachers indicate that their most challenging students showed improvements in classroom performance and decreased discipline problems during involvement in service-learning (Eyler, Bradley, Goldzweig, Schlundt, & Juarez, 2010). Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier (2000) found middle school students who participated in service-learning talked more frequently with their parents about school. Additionally, teachers highlight the value of service-learning in increasing school and classroom attendance (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Wulsin, 2008).

From his research, Furco (2001) concluded that the “unique interactions between the student, the service activity, the community” (p. 45) are the most influential on the ultimate outcomes of the service-learning programs. The relationships developed through service-learning enable learning, growth, empowerment, and social change:

It may be the case that true social progress and social change may occur only to the extent that positive, mutually fulfilling relationships among the constituent groups in a community are created. Such relationships should entail mutual respect and

understanding of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all members of our increasingly multicultural communities. (Stukas & Dunlap, 2002, p. 418)

The development of relationships across boundaries prompts students' reflection on issues of equality and community. Students' construction of an understanding of community need and social justice facilitates and enriches their personal development (Astin & Sax, 1998).

Self authorship. Giroux (2005) proposes that as border crossers, students are positioned to "rewrite their own histories, identities, and learning possibilities" (p. 22). The literature touches on the relationships that exist between critical reflection of social issues and identity development, especially the development of citizenship as a form of political identity (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Yates & Youniss, 1998). Service-learning can be an avenue through which students encounter their own privilege, facilitating growth in their perspectives on social issues, commitment to social justice, and intention to personally effect change (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Henry, 2005). As such, service-learning students perceive their own personal growth as tied to a larger civic responsibility and commitment to societal growth and improvement (Singer, King, Green, & Barr, 2002).

To develop cross-cultural knowledge, service-learners must adopt an understanding of the multiplicities of knowledge, power, identity, and learning (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Hopson, 2002). According to Baxter Magolda (2000), the potential for opportunities that develop self-authorship is central to service-learning:

Connection to others in service contexts can create dissonance with perspectives adopted from external sources. Reflecting on the meaning of service-learning experiences with supportive others, a central component of service-learning as an educational process,

offers the opportunity to acquire an internal sense of self and to struggle with the relationship of agency and communion. (p. 154)

Baxter Magolda (2000) views self-authorship as a process of constructing a self-directed identity based on the creation of knowledge of oneself in relation to one's reading of the social world. Therefore, social interpretations and constructions of the self are interdependent. The ethical reasoning required to develop social interpretations was also described by Leming (2001) as a process occurring within adolescent identity development.

Service-learning's long-term impact on self-authorship is described in two longitudinal studies. Both Jones and Abes (2004) and Yates and Youniss (1998) found service-learning to have a lasting influence on students' identity development and self-authorship several years after their participation in a service-learning course. Mainly presenting the experience of Caucasian college students from privileged backgrounds, Jones and Abes (2004) suggest that service-learning's "enduring influence...was [the] construction of a more integrated identity evidenced by complexity in thinking about self and relationships with others, and openness to new ideas and experiences, and shifts in future commitments" (p. 149). Yates and Youniss (1998), investigating the experiences of African American students at a parochial high school, similarly concluded that service-learning's social processes facilitate youth's identity development, including social relatedness, agency, and moral-political awareness.

Jones and Abes (2004) considered how participants' identity was impacted through ongoing reflection of the relationship between self and other through their work at two community organizations, a food pantry and an AIDS service organization. Interactions in these settings "disrupted, challenged, and reconstructed" (p. 163) students' notions of self and other. They explain: "The context of service-learning enabled students to construct their identities in

the complicated, challenging, and unfamiliar environments of a community service setting” (p. 163). The students also experienced a transformation in their understanding of their own privilege. Jones and Abes (2004) theorize that growth across “identity (intrapersonal), interpersonal, and cognitive domains” enabled self-authorship.

Correspondingly, Yates and Youniss (1998) explain that students’ experiences at a soup kitchen “provided opportunities to apply and test notions of self, others, and society” (p. 500). These events continued to inform students’ notions of power and their belief in their personal responsibility to be politically active change agents several years later. Yates and Youniss’ (1998) findings also highlighted students’ self-authorship within the context of racial inequalities:

Students’ understanding of the meaning of being Black Americans was also a central issue directly addressed in the essays and discussion groups. These discussions were almost always overtly political. As students considered the societal distribution of power and government policies toward minority groups, they reflected on their own political status in society and their ability to alter that status. (p. 503)

Youth were positioned to critically reflect on political ideologies used to interpret society, and years later, Yates and Youniss (1998) found students’ experiences continued to inform their thinking as adults. By using social skills to intervene in the status quo, students experienced having agency and developed a sense of responsibility for social justice (Yates & Youniss, 1998).

Conclusion

Critical theory has long acknowledged the oppressive forces at work in schooling, while advancing pedagogies for empowerment. Service-learning may position students to identify

oppression, challenge the status quo, and work towards empowerment. Fine (1991) exhibits the need for such pedagogies:

Low income schools officially contain rather than explore social and economic contradictions, condone rather than critique prevailing social and economic inequities, and usher children and adolescents into ideologies and ways of interpreting social evidence that legitimate rather than challenge conditions of inequity. (p. 61)

Can the school, through service-learning, foster children's development as active members of society, giving them a new sense of themselves as "potential change agents" (Schine, 1999, p. 12)?

At low-performing schools, only eight percent of students report that their school offers service-learning classes; these are the same students who demonstrate the greatest interest in learning through service and who are also leaving schools in unprecedented numbers (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008). Students who drop out report a lack of connection to the school environment, a perception that school is boring, and a feeling of disengagement (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) ask us to consider a student's account:

If they related to me more and understand that at that point in time, my life was...what I was going through, where I lived, where I came from. Who knows? That book might have been in my book bag. I might have bought a book bag and done some work. (p. 12)

A wide gap remains between students who want service learning opportunities and the number who have access to them, and this gap is largest for minority students. This study provides an exploration of the service-learning experiences of non-dominant, marginalized high school

students. Student descriptions of their interactions in service-learning community networks are examined to decipher the ways in which they empower and author themselves and their learning.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

To explore service-learning from the perspectives of learners, this study employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth view of the processes three marginalized, male, urban high school students engaged in as they participated in service-learning. The focus of this section is the methods that were employed to explore these processes, beginning with a consideration of the aims of qualitative research, and specifically case study research within a critical theoretical framework. From here, a subjectivity statement identifies the values I brought to the research. A discussion of the research design, including context of the study, selection of participants, research sites, gaining access, and establishing a membership role follows. Then, attention turns to the procedures for data collection, transformation, and representation. The section concludes with the methods for establishing trustworthiness and rigor.

To explore students' experiences of service learning, the following questions guided the study:

1. How do three male, marginalized, urban high school students empower themselves through participating in service-learning?
2. How do three male, marginalized, urban high school students author themselves through service-learning experiences?

Service-learning activities studied included student participation in school-based service activities as well as in-school reflection and complimentary academic activities. Processes of empowerment and self-authorship, and experiences of schooling, are dynamic, socially-situated constructs that define students' development through service-learning.

Qualitative inquiry aims to understand the human experience (Stake, 1995). Qualitative methods were used in this study to develop a deep understanding of what processes occur when high school students participate in service-learning. I approached this investigation with a theoretical framework of critical theory. This research, as described by Kincheloe (2008), explicitly seeks to construct information that is useful in the struggle against oppression and suffering. With this critical perspective, the study aimed not only to describe experiences of service-learning, but espoused a personal commitment to explore and initiate change for marginalized students (Eisenhart, 2006). This approach requires understanding multiple contexts, building trusting relationships with research participants, and also developing concrete ways to address the concerns of diverse groups (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

A qualitative case study research design was chosen to facilitate an exploration through not only my perspective, “but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). To do case study research, which strives to “preserve multiple realities” (p. 19), researchers must be patient, reflective, and open to considering other perspectives of processes and events (Stake, 1995).

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) traced the development of the qualitative field through its “successive waves of epistemological theorizing” (p. 4), demonstrating the dynamic nature of the qualitative tradition. From this historical perspective, Denzin and Lincoln (2008) defined qualitative research as:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes,

interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. (p. 4)

Researchers aligned with the qualitative tradition view particularities of individuals and contexts as vital to understanding, and emphasize personal interpretation, while acknowledging the holistic nature of phenomena (Stake, 1995). It is through this personal involvement that qualitative approaches reveal unexpected processes and outcomes (Eisenhart, 2006).

The case study approach to educational research is informed by its interdisciplinary development through fields such as anthropology, history, psychology, and sociology (Merriam, 1988). Case study is defined by Merriam (1988) as: “An intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 21). Creswell (1998) described case study as an exploration of a “bounded system” (p. 21), called a case, through in-depth data collection using multiple sources. In Creswell’s view, the constructs of time and place are vital in delineating the case. By focusing on a single, bounded instance, or system, case study research seeks to identify the interaction of key factors central to the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988).

Case study is regarded as a method for gaining insight to a specific situation through an up-close and firsthand understanding (Yin, 2006). “Insight, discovery, and interpretation” (p. 10) are its major aims (Merriam, 1988). Grounded in real, lived situations, the case study presents a “rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (p. 32), offering insights that expand readers’ views (Merriam, 1988). Researchers undertaking case studies dedicate an extended amount of time at the research site gaining personal contact with the activities of the case, as well as engaged in a continual process of reflection on and reconsideration of the meanings of processes gathered from the case (Stake, 2008).

Case studies can illuminate new meanings, contributing to and constructing deeper understanding within a field's knowledge base (Merriam, 1988). Case studies, through their thick descriptions, are also valued as an approach to provide voice to the experiences of those who are not traditionally represented in the literature (Tellis, 1997). These meaningful, real-world attributes of case study research have the ability to powerfully impact and improve teaching practice (Merriam, 1988).

Qualitative researchers are “variously committed to modern, postmodern, and postexperimental sensibilities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 10). The framework of this study aligns with postmodern epistemologies that challenge conventional positivist and interpretive framed research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Kincheloe (2008) expressed: “In this context, critical pedagogical knowledge producers deconstruct positivism’s obsession with measurement and frequency, asking in the process questions of being and meaning—ontology and hermeneutics—about the phenomena in question” (p. 136). Therefore, the aim is not to present others’ view of ‘reality’ or claim neutrality in this depiction, but to explicitly recognize that qualitative research is a value-laden search for understanding within which there is no one version of truth. Therefore, I embarked on this work with an “avowed commitment” (p. 577) to social justice and an acknowledgment of my subjectivities (Eisenhart, 2006). The subjectivities I brought to the study are explored in the following section.

Subjectivity Statement

As a form of interpretive inquiry, qualitative researchers construct an interpretation of “what they see, hear, and understand” (Creswell, 2009, p. 176). As such, my interpretations are related to my background, experiences, and world view. The questions we choose to ask, and the ways we seek answers serve to advance our value-laden epistemologies (Kincheloe, 2008).

I acknowledge that the questions posed, methods utilized, and the approaches to analysis selected are products of my subjectivities. As a researcher aligned with critical theory, I engaged in the research as a self-reflexive practitioner while striving to be explicit with my own moral commitments within this study (Eisenhart, 2006).

My experiences with service-learning began while serving as the executive director of a non-profit, community-based, afterschool enrichment program. During these three years, I worked to develop service-learning as a core component of the afterschool curriculum. Based on this experience, I believe children benefit from having meaningful roles in which they actively work to address real world needs. While helping a group of students assemble holiday food baskets as a part of a service-learning project, I observed a high level of engagement, cooperation, and sense of satisfaction among children. As a fourth grader enthusiastically remarked while organizing boxes of fruit for those in need: “I *like* doing work like this!”

It was through this experience in organizing service-learning activities for elementary children, while simultaneously studying critical pedagogy, that my curiosities regarding service-learning within a critical theory framework developed. My goal was to not only facilitate such authentic experiences and opportunities for citizenship within an afterschool learning environment, but to also use service-learning as an avenue for critical thought and action. I was motivated by an understanding that the least empowered students, as McLaren (1989) contended: “do not need to be tamed, controlled, and/or rescued; they need to be respected viewed as experts in their interest areas, and inspired with the impassioned spirit to use education to do good things in the world” (p. 8).

In undertaking this study, I must first pause to consider the assumptions I brought to the research. The two major assumptions underlying the research purpose and questions are: (1)

that students would want to participate in service-learning and (2) that students would describe a change in their experiences of schooling as a result of service-learning.

Research Design

In order to develop in-depth interpretations, qualitative designs require researchers “to be in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgment, analyzing and synthesizing, all the while realizing their own consciousness” (Stake, 1995, p. 41). The research design enabled ample time for personal contact with participants, and centered around my role as a participant observer in the research site. This section focuses on the context of the study, methods for selecting research participants and sites, and addresses the benefits and challenges associated with my membership role.

Context of study. The study occurred in a city in rural New York State. The city is located on the Hudson River, a historically important natural resource for trade and transportation. The first European settlements in the area were established by Dutch and German immigrants in the early 1600s. The city’s population has largely reflected immigration patterns, with English dominating the city in the early 19th century, which was followed by an influx of Irish, Italian, Polish, Jewish, and Asian immigrants. In the 1900s, the city’s last large immigration occurred as African Americans from Southern states followed opportunities for work in the city’s industrial center. Since the 1960s, the city has experienced a decline in population, with many residents moving into neighboring cities and suburbs that constitute a sprawling urban area. As a percentage, the African American community has grown substantially since then, mainly due to middle class White families moving to the suburbs while African American families have remained within city limits.

Children and youth are served by a city school district. The district operates one public high school. Among local residents, there is a growing sense of urgency in remedying the failing public system. In regards to the high school, the district's superintendent stated: "The school's four-year graduation rate of 54% is far below where it needs to be" (Colucciello, 2011, p.2). However, the high school is also characterized by wide disparities among ethnic groups. There is variance in graduation rates among groups with 47 percent of African American, 45 percent of Latino, and 76 percent of White students graduating (NY State Department of Education, 2011a). In recent years the city has experienced growth in charter schools, including the first charter high school, Grandview Community Charter High School.

Selection of participants. Grandview Community Charter High School was established in 2008. In its first year of operation 100 boys were enrolled. This high school was used as the research site to better understand service-learning. Based on my communication with the principal and service-learning coordinator at the school, as well as reports from the New York State Department of Education and local media, I provide the following description of the school and its students.

Grandview's enrollment of 320 students consists of 90% eligible for free/reduced lunch. The student body is predominantly African American, constituting over three quarters of the population, with Latino students making up the second largest ethnic group (NY State Department of Education, 2011b). While 32% of the 46 school staff and faculty are African American, nearly 60% are White, and Asian and Latino staff constitute approximately eight percent. An all-male school, Grandview was designed to address the most challenging issues facing the city's public high school. These include wide disparities between the academic achievement of White and minority students, high dropout rates, heavy gang involvement, and

poverty. To ensure a high need population, enrollment priority was granted to students from families where no one has been to college (Green Tech High, 2010).

Participants were selected from the first 100 boys who enrolled in the school. As they entered their senior year, these students were required to complete a rigorous service-learning program in which they committed a minimum of 100 hours to a service project of their choice. The service-learning coordinator described the main aspiration of the program was to “create change agents—individuals who recognize the problems and assets within their communities who are equipped with the knowledge and experience to make real change as opposed to depending on outside sources.” The service-learning program’s focus areas were in antipoverty initiatives, technological proficiency, environmental/green initiatives, civic engagement, and mentoring.

Participants for this study included three students in the twelfth grade at Grandview who participated in the service-learning program, as well as the service-learning coordinator. The participants engaged in service activities several times per week, and sometimes daily, for the duration of their senior year. Grandview’s service-learning program aimed to position students to acquire leadership and mentorship skills, internship opportunities, and a resume that would assist them in pursuing higher education. The program also intended to develop independent, well rounded, active citizens in their communities and society. One strong component of the program was the level of interaction students had with the local community. As individuals or as groups, the students had flexible school schedules to enable their frequent outings to service-learning sites to meet, work, and interact with community organizations.

Purposeful sampling. According to Stake (1995): “Case study research is not sampling research” (p. 4), in that a case is not selected in order to generalize to others. In accordance,

Patton (2002) explained that the study of “information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230). Instead, the researcher’s priority is to deeply understand the one case under study. In selecting a case, the most important criteria is to locate a case which will maximize what can be learned (Stake, 1995).

Purposeful sampling was used to intentionally choose participants to deepen understanding of the concepts central to the research purpose (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Qualitative research aims to develop detailed understanding of small, purposefully selected samples, as Patton (2002) described: “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 230). Purposeful sampling seeks cases that are rich with relevant information central to the research purpose (Patton, 2002). Therefore, the intention in selecting the case for study was to choose a context that would build an increased understanding of service-learning (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

Three male twelfth grade students and the service-learning coordinator were selected to participate in the study. The three students were selected based on their dedication to service-learning and their potential to demonstrate growth through the program. As seniors, the students were entering their most active year in the service-learning program and were involved in on-going community action projects. Therefore, the participants selected demonstrated the greatest potential for yielding rich data to inform an enhanced insight to students’ experiences of service-learning.

Research sites. Grandview Community Charter High School was the research site. The students and the service-learning coordinator were observed participating in service-learning activities within the school campus. Observations concentrated on the interactions between students and the tasks they engaged in as they participated in service activities. In school

observation of students also focused on students' process of reflection as they discussed their experience of service-learning, interactions with community, and developed interpretations of their experiences. Participant interviews were conducted at the school as well. The interviews aimed to glean the students' understandings of the processes involved in service-learning.

Membership role. This study concerned a situation in which I was an outsider, meaning I had to gain access to and establish membership in the activities being studied. According to Charmaz (2006), researchers gain access through trust which is established by building on-going relationships with participants. Initial access was gained through communications with gatekeepers of the program, the principal and service-learning coordinator at Grandview. Relationships were naturally forged due to a common interest in service-learning and a shared curiosity in the outcomes of such programs.

Establishing trusting relationships with the student participants was a top priority during the initial phases of data collection. Not only is trust essential for gaining access to rich data, but these relationships also provide a humanity-affirming experience for both the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2006). Once my membership was established within the school community, I maintained a "dual purpose" (Spradley, 1980, p. 58) during data collection, by attempting to expand my awareness of the situation as I engaged in the activities. My approach was to "maintain balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participation and observation" (Spradley, 1980, p. 60) through moderate participation in the activities being studied.

Procedures for Data Collection

Data collection utilized a case study approach. The analytic strategies employed in case study research are appropriate to this study due to its exploratory nature. Gall, Gall, and Borg

(2003) explained that the “design of each case study is specific to the phenomenon being studied and to the researcher conducting the study” (p. 441). In their view, the role of the researcher in data collection is complex, as they must become deeply involved in the phenomenon being studied. Similarly, Merriam (1988) stated that researchers must be “physically and psychologically” (p. 68) close to the data. In Stake’s (1995) opinion, the qualitative researcher must possess great skill during direct contact with participants to interpret their observations.

The data collection methods employed here were participant observations, interviews, and collecting documents including the researcher’s journal. These methods are commonly used in case study research according to Merriam (1988). These methods yielded three data sources: expanded field notes, interview transcripts, and documents. Within these varied sources I looked “for the detail of interaction within its contexts” (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

Participant observation. Participant observations were conducted using methods described by Spradley (1980). According to Spradley, the participant observer simultaneously experiences being an insider and an outsider, as they participate and view the situation as an object at the same time. During the observation, field notes were taken using Spradley’s descriptive question matrix as a guide. An effort was made to document each dimension of the situation, including the space, objects, acts, activities, events, time, actors, goals, and feelings.

Interviews. Qualitative interviews were conducted to elicit views from participants (Creswell, 2009). Patton (2002) explained that the purpose of an interview “is to capture how participants view their world, to learn their terminology and judgments and to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences” (p. 348). In order to glean participants’ understandings, five informal conversational interviews were conducted with each

participant. Prior to the interview, an interview guide was developed, as described by Patton (2002). The guide outlined topics to direct an informal conversation between the researcher and participants, which provided flexibility to discover student interpretations of service-learning activities. Each interview lasted 45 minutes to an hour. Appendix A details the focus of each interview.

Interview questions aimed to address the research purpose and included open-ended questions: What experiences led you to choose your service focus area? What does it mean to you to be a service-learning student at Grandview? Describe your typical service experiences. Describe your interactions with community members at service sites. What are the challenges facing your community? How has your perspective of these challenges developed through service-learning?

Documents. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) explained that qualitative researchers often study written communications. Documents rely on written language to express meaning, and may include sources such as personal letters and diaries. The authors recommend that the researcher first identify documents that are available in regards to the situation under study, decide what materials are most relevant, and then determine how to collect the documents. In this study, the researcher's reflective journal was a critical source of data, since the journal entries were in direct response to the research purpose. The value of researcher-prepared documents, with the intent of learning more about the situation under study, was described by Merriam (1988) who explained that documents "help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights" (p. 118). Other documents included those generated by research participants. These consisted of documents used for planning and assessment by the

service-learning coordinator and reflective writings and assignments composed by students. Documents were described and analyzed periodically throughout the duration of the study.

Recording and managing data. A challenge in conducting case study research is in collecting and managing vast amounts of data. Therefore, the researcher must develop an organization system to manage the data. Using a database system enables the researcher to track and organize data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

As Spradley (1980) explained, I became the research instrument, by keeping detailed field notes “of both objective observations and subjective feelings” (p. 58). Saldana (2009) defined field notes as: “the researcher’s written documentation of participant observation, which may include the observer’s personal and subjective responses to and interpretations of social action encountered” (p. 33). Field notes were expanded, in accordance with Spradley’s (1980) methods, immediately after the observation. Hand written notes were typed into an electronic document, reviewed, and prominent items bolded. These prominent items were then coded, using the procedures described in the following section. Codes and analytic memos were initially recorded in the margins of the page, and then re-ordered into lists based on similarity of items as described by LeCompte (2000). Listing served to lump the data into related groups, and were then analyzed between data sources. LeCompte (2000) explained that “Researchers must create a structure and impose it on the data” (p. 147) to give the data initial organization. As Merriam (1988) suggested, the codes were written on index cards to allow physical manipulation, stacking, and arranging to explore relationships among them.

Procedures for Data Transformation and Representation

The data analysis techniques employed in this study included coding, re-coding, analytic memo writing, and categorizing. Through these techniques, I engaged in an iterative process of

inductive analysis, which was conducted concurrent to data collection, as described by Saldana (2009). This non-linear process “of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 154). This section identifies each data analysis procedure that was used to reduce data to “manageable chunks” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 156).

Coding. Saldana (2009) defined coding as: “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of a language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Coding is recommended as an analytic strategy for various data sources, including those used in this study, field notes and documents (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) described coding as a “cyclical” (p. 45), analytic process in which data are coded and re-coded.

Data analysis procedures in this study applied a cyclical process of coding and re-coding using both In Vivo and Process Coding techniques. Both of these coding methods are appropriate for case study research (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) explained that two or more coding methods may be required to interpret processes and phenomena, and he recommends their mixing and matching as appropriate. Coding decisions were made during the initial review of the data, in light of the research purpose. According to Saldana (2009), the coding method should complement the study’s theoretical framework, address the research questions, and be comfortable to the researcher. Essentially, coding methods should generate new insights and connections about the participants and their processes (Saldana, 2009).

Analytic memos. Concurrent to data collection and throughout coding processes, analytic memo writing was employed as an analytical approach. According to Saldana (2009), analytic memos are valuable for facilitating reflection, and can be used for exploring many

aspects of the study. Memos were written during the coding process, as new ideas and insights became apparent. Analytic memos were coded and re-coded using the same procedure previously discussed. The purpose of analytic memo writing in this study was to reflect on the coding process, the researchers' experience as an observer, research questions, emerging codes, and themes.

Codebook. Saldana (2009) recommends maintaining a codebook. As he described, a separate file was created solely for the purpose of documenting and describing codes. During the coding process, the codebook was reviewed to compare salient items across data sources. Saldana (2009) stated: "Maintaining this list provides an analytic opportunity to organize and reorganize the codes into major categories and subcategories" (p. 21). The process of defining codes was helpful in identifying relationships among codes. This involved grouping codes by their similarities, a process Saldana (2009) called codifying. Saldana (2009) explained codifying as the method of arranging or classifying data in a systematic order. The process of arranging and ordering, as suggested by Saldana (2009), began to form categories.

Categorizing. Preliminary categories were identified from the codification of data. Categories contain groupings of coded data; to develop categories from codes, Saldana (2009) recommends working within codes to define a propositional statement, a rule for inclusion in the category, and then working across codes by comparing them to each other. By carefully considering the codes, their definitions, and reflecting on their meanings within the context of the experience, categories were developed.

Saldana (2009) stated that: "When the major categories are compared with each other and consolidated in various ways, you begin to transcend the "reality" of your data and progress toward the thematic, conceptual, and theoretical" (p.11). In this way, data analysis identified

themes that developed insight to participants' meanings and experiences. Saldana (2009) explained that while codes describe explicit components of data, themes describe subtle and tacit processes and are outcomes of "coding, categorization, and analytic reflection" (p. 13). Themes emerged from reflection, analytic memo writing, reviewing the codebook, and by sketching graphic organizers to impose structure on categories and codes.

Data representation. Qualitative data representations depict for the reader the researchers experience in the field (Eisenhart, 2006). Stake (1995) explained:

To sharpen the search for understanding, qualitative researchers perceive what is happening in key episodes or testimonies, represent happenings with their own direct interpretation and stories (i.e., narratives). Qualitative research uses these narratives to optimize the opportunity of the reader to gain an experiential understanding of the case. (p. 40)

Data representations should demonstrate the range of findings developed through analysis, including negative examples that contradict the findings. A major aim of the representation of findings should also be "to reveal unexpected information, processes, or outcomes that emerge from the researcher's dedication to understanding an unfamiliar situation by interacting directly in it" (Eisenhart, 2006, p. 572). Additionally, research in critical-theory, aims to represent data in a way that motivates positive social action and change (Eisenhart, 2006).

Reciprocity and Ethics

Qualitative researchers must be sensitive to the impact of their field work on participants' time, privacy, and daily routines (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The principal and service-learning coordinator at Grandview were interested in the ways in which the research would inform their school practices. The service-learning coordinator viewed the research as a

process of furthering her own understanding and development of the program. Prior to the study, the service-learning coordinator indicated that the students were eager to participate in service-learning opportunities during their senior year and many indicated a desire to exceed the minimum 100 hour requirement.

Participants were offered relevant data, such as interview transcripts, and other forms of feedback to deepen their understanding of their service-learning experiences. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), the researcher cannot be a neutral observer, participants will not “respond to or trust someone who will not take a stand” (p. 79). Therefore, the emphasis was on establishing supportive relationships, in which the participants and I embarked on a voyage of discovery together.

The personal and in-depth nature of qualitative inquiry calls for special consideration of research ethics. The research adhered to rigorous procedures for informed consent prior to participants’ involvement in the study. Participant roles were voluntary and participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without punitive consequences. I provided participants relevant information about the study to inform their decision on whether or not to participate in the research (Silverman, 2005). Participants’ identities were protected to the greatest extent possible. Assent and consent forms for research participants are located in appendix B.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Qualitative researchers engage in an ongoing interpretation of data throughout both its collection and analysis. Interpretation of findings involves strategies of triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking to ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study (Creswell, 2009). Post-modernists contend that rigor is established by demonstrating “that many different

voices have been brought to bear on the issue” (Eisenhart, 2006, p. 578). Therefore, a central aspect in building rigor in this study focused on representing diverse perspectives on service-learning.

Triangulation. Data-gathering from more than one source greatly enhances the rigor of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). An alternative to validity, triangulation in qualitative studies “is the simultaneous display of multiple, refracted realities” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 8). This process of triangulation aims to verify an interpretation by using multiple sources to clarify meaning (Stake, 2008). Marshall and Rossman (2006) explained a fundamental interpretive strength of qualitative research is through triangulation, which is: “not so much about getting ‘truth’ but rather about finding the multiple perspectives for knowing the social world” (p. 204). By striving to identify codes, categories, and themes across data sources and among participants, triangulation enhanced the quality of the findings.

Peer debriefing. Peer debriefing is recommended for adding rigor to qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). A professional outside of the context of the study played the role of a “critical friend who thoughtfully and gently questions the researcher’s analysis” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 202). This feedback served to balance my subjectivities. Peer support and discussions about challenges with coding and analysis provided assistance in identifying previously unseen associations and meanings. By verbalizing ideas to peers, emerging lines of thought were clarified and lead to new interpretations of the data (Saldana, 2009).

Member checks. Member checking, the process of consulting with participants, is suggested by Saldana (2009) to legitimize initial findings identified during analysis. Charmaz (2006) described member checking as “taking ideas back to research participants for their confirmation” (p. 111) while explaining that these subsequent visits can also provide the

opportunity to engage the participant in elaborating initial findings. Member checks provided participants' the chance to dialogue with the researcher, clarify interpretations, and contribute additional perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This strategy was utilized to review, confirm, and elaborate initial findings with participants.

Potential of the Study and Possible Contributions

This study explored the processes of empowerment and the social structures created through service-learning. The study intended to understand students' self-authorship as they negotiated learning spaces within community. These spaces have the potential to position students to encounter social injustices in new ways that facilitate students' re-authoring of self and community identities. The aim was to describe three male, marginalized, urban high school students' experiences as service-learners. Students described what happened through their development as learners and as change agents within the context of service and community need.

An in-depth, holistic understanding of service-learning as experienced by students at a low-income, non-dominant high school, which was lacking from the literature, is the major contribution of the research. It is theorized that increased service-learning opportunities in low-performing, non-dominant high schools will improve retention (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008; Eyer & Giles, 1999; Simonet, 2008). Service-learning pedagogies, through the co-creation of new intellectual and social spaces, may counter the oppressive practices of silencing and exclusion described by Fine (1991). This study not only describes empowerment, but also shows the possibilities for engaging diverse learners whose life experiences and cultural forms of knowledge have not been legitimated by schooling. Furthermore, the study also aimed to present the underrepresented voices of non-dominant

youth. Their interpretations of service-learning will have implications for the continued refinement of service-learning pedagogies.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this case study was to relate participants' experience of service-learning to critical theory. I explored the role of service-learning on the ways in which three male, marginalized, urban high school students empowered themselves and their learning practices.

The questions guiding the study were:

1. How do three male, marginalized, urban high school students empower themselves through participating in service-learning?
2. How do three male, marginalized, urban high school students author themselves through service-learning experiences?

This study was concerned with empowerment as described in critical theory. Attention was placed on students' negotiation of power and knowledge, and the way these interactions were empowering moments that positioned students to redefine their experience of schooling and their identities as learners. The intention was to explore students' intellectual engagement in "building new social spaces" (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995, p. 8). I theorized that these spaces are the intellectual ground that students will cross over to re-conceptualize the relationship of self, society, and other (Giroux, 2005; McLaren & Giarelli, 1995).

The re-authoring of these relationships, directed by students, speaks to Freire's (2009) efforts to reshape the world through such transformative actions that occurs through liberation and empowerment. By exploring processes of empowerment and the social structures created through service-learning, a better understanding of students' self-authorship as they negotiate learning spaces within community was constructed. Of special concern was the manner in

which these spaces have the potential to position students to encounter social injustices in new ways that facilitate a re-authoring of self and community identities.

This chapter presents the data that were collected from August 2011 through June 2012, beginning with a description of the research setting of the case study followed by a detailed section on the study participants. The service-learning curriculum is introduced, with the most relevant aspects highlighted using excerpts from data sources. From here, a cross case analysis of the data explores the themes that emerged from interview transcripts, field notes, and research documents.

The Setting

The school. Grandview Community Charter High School (Grandview) is a newly constructed school for boys that opened in 2008. The school is located on the outskirts of the city's historic downtown, slightly set back from a four lane, yet relatively quiet, boulevard that is lined with sidewalks regularly utilized by students. A sidewalk also cuts through the tidy schoolyard and leads to Grandview's front entrance which is bordered by a large, rounded two-story glass window. A front entrance marquee proudly displays the school's name, crest, and motto: "intellect, initiative, and integrity."

Another newly constructed charter school serving middle school students is located directly across the boulevard, while adjacent to the Grandview is a much larger abandoned former junior high school. The ornate, 80 year old, impressive four story building stands in stark contrast to the newer brick construction. The junior high school closed its doors in 2009 due to issues of safety and poor academic performance as measured by standardized test scores. The school was also named on the state's list of persistently dangerous schools (City School District of Albany, 2009). The proximity of these schools, representative of two different

approaches, characterizes the state of schooling in the city: old schools being abandoned, while charter schools pop up at a quickening pace.

A small side street, framed by tall maple trees runs between Grandview and the vacant school. The yard of the abandoned school was regularly utilized by Grandview students playing football during their lunch periods. A much smaller lawn runs the length of Grandview's property. During the spring semester, the grass lawn was transformed into an edible schoolyard as students installed raised bed gardens, a greenhouse, and planted apple trees. The side street quickly dead-ends at an 82-acre nature preserve, the state's second largest urban wildlife sanctuary. This area, at the northern border of the campus is thickly wooded. In contrast, an interstate highway borders the eastern edge of Grandview's campus.

The staff parking lot is tucked behind the school and is enclosed by a portable classroom building and several large, walk-in storage containers that house sporting equipment. A series of double glass doors are located in the rear of the school. To enter the school, the office attendant must unlock the door, however, most often a student in the vicinity would courteously open the door. Directly across from the entrance is a framed picture of President Obama with a quotation which reads: "We are the change we've been waiting for," as well as glass cases that display trophies and student of the month awards. The entry way was usually noisy as the sounds of student activities spill out of the gymnasium and the student union, a large, open, multi-purpose area. The student union serves as a cafeteria, music room, and meeting place. Through a series of windows, tables of students eating and enjoying the relaxed, social atmosphere were visible. It was here that students were free to express their lively nature. In one instance the student union came alive as a student spontaneously burst into a song and dance that had the whole union cheering him on.

The main office stands directly across the corridor from the student union. The office is decorated with a colorful framed poster of the word "diversidad." Various flyers posted around the office keep parents informed of school board meetings, school activities, and upcoming visits from college recruiters. A poster display asks: "Are your living circumstances uncertain? If so, you still qualify for a free public education and transportation to your school no matter where you live."

Both of Grandview's two stories offer a similar layout of shiny, clean hallways lined with bright blue lockers. In the downstairs hallway, a series of framed posters feature photographs of prominent African Americans, such as Harriet Tubman, Jackie Robinson, and Sojourner Truth, outlining their achievements as civil rights leaders. Through the windows of the classroom doors, rows of uniformed students appear orderly arranged at their desks and neatly dressed in blue button down shirts, green ties, and black slacks.

The service-learning program is housed within the school's counseling suite located on the first floor. The suite consists of a central room with a large conference table for group work and meetings, a popular gathering place for students, as well as offices of the school psychologist, director of college counseling, and family coordinator. An additional office is shared by the service-learning coordinator and the college counselor coordinator, both placed in the school as AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Their welcoming office, decorated with VISTA and college posters as well as a service-learning award perched on the window sill, is ever busy with an ongoing flow of students.

A standard practice at Grandview is to formally greet each student by their last name. A participant in the study explained the school's custom:

I think because the school is a college prep school, our principal told us that like in college most the professors aren't really going to know who you are and if they do it'll only be by your last name. So if they're ever going to call on you in class they're going to call you by your last name. So he was like that's how we're going to run the school, no one ever gets called by their first name, it's always Mr. such and such.

Interactions between students and staff largely communicate mutual respect. As a researcher in the school, students and staff also extended their courteous demeanor as they welcomed me in to their daily routine.

The Service-Learning Curriculum

Grandview's approach to service-learning integrated community engagement with school-based learning and reflection with aims for social change. Each student enrolled in Grandview was required to complete 100 hours of service prior to graduation. Students recorded their service-learning hours using noble hour, a web-based online tool specifically designed for such purposes. According to their website, Grandview's program "takes service beyond a mere graduation requirement" so that:

The "community" becomes a legitimate place where they, the individual, are needed and it is only them with their way with words, or handling of a hammer or some other unique personal attribute, that has the ability to affect change.

Students were able to express a great deal of individualism within the program by having the freedom to choose their own service activities based on their passions, skills, and schedules.

Such hands-on work in the community was at the core of the service-learning curriculum, which included a wide variety of projects organized by local non-profit and community-based organizations as well as those initiated by Grandview itself. Students were

encouraged to make long-term commitments to an organization of their choice. Many students selected mentoring opportunities with the YMCA and other neighborhood afterschool programs. Students also addressed issues of food security and hunger by working at food pantries or community gardens. Other opportunities chosen by students included art-based neighborhood revitalization projects, anti-violence campaigns, and anti-poverty initiatives that mobilized students as street teams to spread awareness of community resources. Students could also pursue options to engage in service at Grandview by mentoring younger students, participating in school service days, and taking on leadership roles with the service-learning program. For the students in the study especially, responsibilities as leaders of the service-learning program were a large part of their experience. In addition to their on-going commitments, a variety of day or afternoon-long options were available for students to volunteer at one-time events. These included assisting at various fundraisers and community programs, for example helping to prepare a holiday dinner at a youth shelter.

In addition to the actual hands-on work in their communities, the service-learning curriculum was composed of several key elements that wove service throughout the school culture and every day experiences as a Grandview student. These included morning advisory sessions, freshman fraternity sessions, a social justice class, and an international service-learning trip. Through these elements students tied their acts of service to a broader consideration of social change as they reflected on their community experiences in light of the inequities and complexities they encountered. In this sense, the service-learning program was academically grounded in an ongoing study of social justice that occurred both in and outside of the classroom.

Morning advisories. Once a week, a 20 minute morning advisory period served as an informational forum focused on service-learning. The service-learning coordinator prepared activities, presentations, and discussion points for the school's teachers, who were charged with leading the advisories in their individual classrooms. Seniors had the option of assisting teachers with the morning advisories, and were valuable in sharing their first-hand knowledge and experience of service-learning with freshman. The advisories functioned to engage students in thinking about their role in the community and how they could make a meaningful impact through service. By using this free time to explore community engagement and local issues, the advisories demonstrated Grandview's culture of service. Teachers would often relate to the theme of the session by sharing personal stories, which established a respectful learning environment while informing students that Grandview's service-learning requirement was a meaningful way for students to engage in community work.

Field notes excerpt dated September 15, 2011. I am sitting at a student desk in the rear of the global studies classroom near a row of four computers. The room is boldly decorated with all sorts of posters, art, wall hangings. My eye is drawn to a bumper sticker resting on the chalkboard that reads: "No one is free when others are oppressed." The global studies teacher, Ms. Coulter, is an African American woman appearing to be in her 50s. Ms. Williams suggested I observe her classroom because on a recent student survey she was named as a favorite. In between bells, seven ninth grade boys trickle in and arrange themselves in a cluster closest to Ms. Coulter's desk. Three of the boys are in a heated discussion, Ms. Coulter interjects that she will not tolerate it any further and the group sits quietly.

Ms. Coulter turns on the power point projector, and the words "problems, service, learning, change, personal, solutions" are displayed on the screen. Ms. Coulter reads the words

aloud and offers an interpretation of how these words may relate. The second slide presents a scenario where a community center is closing and asks the group to reflect on how they could take action to keep the center open. Ms. Coulter asks the boys for their personal experiences: “Does anyone currently go to a community center? Where?” One boy explains that the center he went to was closed when the building was sold. Others offer that they go to church centers in their neighborhoods; one student says he goes to the “Y.” Ms. Coulter asks them to consider how they could raise awareness if they were facing the problem of their centers closing. Students raise their hands to propose several ideas to inform the public: going door to door, posting videos on YouTube, and producing public service announcements for television and radio.

Ms. Coulter explains that she grew up in the Bronx and that when their community center closed, her mother took action by starting a community program that taught performing arts. She is displaying great animation and emotion in retelling her childhood. Ms. Coulter also shares her recent experience in meeting a man she grew up with, and how he recalled the importance of her mother to him and the community. She explains that her mother is “84 now, and 40 years after the fact, people are still talking about the difference she made in their lives.” She is almost dancing with enthusiasm as she tells her story. I cannot help but smile. Ms. Coulter emphasizes her point, telling the boys: "You play a part in your community."

Social justice class. Grandview seniors had the option to enroll in an elective social justice class that was offered for the first time during the 2011-2012 school year. Ms. Williams, the service-learning coordinator, was charged with the development and instruction of the class. The aim for this capstone course was to provide twelfth grade students a culminating piece for their service-learning experiences in the community. A central goal was to facilitate students’

critical reflection on the issues they encountered through service-learning. Ms. Williams explained that as students link their service-learning experiences to social justice ideas, they would develop greater insight to their community work and its connection to broader social issues and inequalities.

The central question of the class asked: Do we all really have equal opportunities? Through a collaborative group work approach, Ms. Williams positioned the students to reflect on oppression within their own lives. Student voices and experiences were a part of the curriculum. Ms. Williams encouraged: “This class is always about your focused participation.” The content of the class was often based in current events, such as the Occupy Movement and the murder of Trayvon Martin. Such events were a platform for exploring the issues of power at play in society. Student discussion helped to examine oppression and identify how unequal power arrangements enable the inequities and injustices students encountered in their city. In this way, Ms. Williams intent was to lead a “class action lawsuit against the status quo.”

Despite these ambitious aims, the main tone of the class was often one of frustration. Ms. Williams was challenged in maintaining the attention of the class, and as a result the more serious students became increasingly discontent. One afternoon Mr. Jackson, a student who was sincerely interested in the content and described it was a way to make an impact, got up from his desk shaking his head in frustration. Looking at me, he grumbled: “This class is out of control.”

Additionally, while an ongoing exploration of race was a goal of the course, students used race as a way to put their peers down. Students provoked each other, calling a darker skinned student “African” which resulted in a hostile exchange of remarks. A few moments later when asked what factors of oppression they can associate with, the only Middle Eastern

student shared how he felt oppressed by crime. Immediately, a student snapped: “Oh come on, Patel!,” clearly attempting to delegitimize his claim based on race. Mr. Patel silently shook his head as if to say this was not the first time his experience had been silenced by his peers. Such interactions were a challenge to Ms. Williams as she struggled to call their attention back to focus, stating: “You are all positioned to make a real difference in the world, but you have to get serious and think through the issues I’m trying to present to you.” Ironically, through their exchanges, the students were attempting to direct attention to many of the same issues, especially race. Perhaps a more successful approach would have acknowledged students’ comments, incorporated them into the discussion, and used them as a launching place for an investigation of race and oppression.

At other times, student engagement would spread like wildfire. During these moments of clarity, students would push the conversation forward at a quickening pace, sharing thoughts and developing new interpretations. The class was also fertile ground for storytelling. Students recounted how their parents, families, and teachers crushed their ambitions at a young age. Student voices deepened my perspective: “My parents never, ever, ever sat down to help me with my homework. Not once. That’s why now I’m like f this.” Another student shared how his second grade teacher told him he was “dumb and would never amount to anything.”

The class discussions served to enable students’ critique of their own experiences, and through an emerging understanding of social justice, students began to identify the specifics of their lives as manifestations of oppressive societal forces. The following excerpt captures the classroom discourse on a particularly engaged afternoon. A student’s parent happened to be present in the classroom and also joined in the conversation.

Field notes excerpt dated November 9, 2011.

Ms. Williams: What about someone who's worked hard all their life and loses their job. Is that just unfortunate? Is that an injustice in a country where we are promised certain things? Where's the fairness? Where's the equality in a country where we are promised it?

Student 1: I think this is more of a dream; poverty and richness go in a cycle. Fairness is impossible because it implies perfection. A janitor and a doctor would never make the same amount of money.

Ms. Williams: How is it ok for a person who's lost their job to lose their security?

Multiple students: It's not ok!

Student 2: Everyone has their own problems that they need to deal with, problems they feel like they can't do anything about such as the Gaza Strip [referenced in a video watched earlier in the class], so we escape from reality.

Ms. Williams: When you don't see a way for you to make a change, when everyone around you is silent, what should the people do? What does true democracy look like? How should change occur?

Student 3: If you're on the bottom, your voice means nothing because power and money run everything, our words change nothing.

Student 4: What are we going to do to back those words up? We need to say the words and then put them into action. That's what needs to be done to make a change.

Student 5: That's a good point, but if you have no power. . .

Student 6: Did any Blacks during the civil rights movement have power?

Student 5: Well not as individuals, but as a group.

Parent: Five years ago I was in that exact place [losing his job]. Powerless is a state of mind, it's about you having belief. If people believe there's nothing they can do, you do nothing. Our son will be the first in our family to graduate on time, because he's the one who has pushed himself. I lived through the Civil Rights Movement in the South in the 60s—you talk about having zero power—it was truth. Today's youth have much more privilege and to see them surrender it is heart breaking.

Thursday fraternity sessions. Each Grandview student was a member of a fraternity.

Consistent with the college preparatory aims of the school, fraternities were named for historically Black colleges: Howard, Morehouse, Gramlin, and Hampton. Each fraternity contained a mix of ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students, which provided for supportive interaction across the grades. Within the fraternities, seniors were responsible for mentoring freshman. This approach helped to establish networks of support among students.

Another important component of the fraternities were the weekly Thursday fraternity sessions where seniors led freshman in developing an understanding of service-learning. These meetings, which occurred during students' lunch period, were important in providing a space for student-directed dialogue on service-learning. The seniors who were charged with directing the sessions demonstrated responsibility and initiative in leading the freshman, not to mention a dedication to the service-learning program. They also exhibited well thought out intentions for their meetings as Mr. Harper explained:

Our discussions have focused on professionalism, etiquette, self-growth, self-reflection, what do they think service-learning is? What do they think community service is? What's the difference between them both? We've actually had icebreakers with them, learning about their frat and how it works in the school...had icebreakers with them

about how different frats interact with each other. How to interact with each other and how they should impact their community and how they can make [an impact] in their community as a whole frat. How they can make an impact on their frat by doing good in the classroom and then the little things. We talk to them about the big picture, like how the little things make up the big picture and stuff.

While the service-learning coordinator provided guidance and direction, the responsibility for the sessions was put in the hands of the seniors, who embraced the challenge of leading the younger students.

Field notes excerpt dated November 17, 2011. A teacher's aide enters the class room and Mr. Quinn confidently explains to her that he's "running this." Meanwhile, the freshman abruptly get up from their desks and head for the door, attempting to leave before the frat has even started. Mr. Quinn quickly intervenes and directs the students to take a seat. Mr. Harper immediately takes charge of the session, telling the boys that since they're the only ones there, to move up to the front of the classroom. The students quickly reassemble in the front row of desks. Mr. Jackson chimes in to inform the students that they will be talking about professionalism and etiquette.

Mr. Harper asks "What is professionalism and etiquette?" The seniors begin to role play a scenario of a boss calling an employee who is late to work. The freshman boys are laughing as we watch the seniors' depiction of an unprofessional employee who tells his boss "Yo, homey, just chill." Returning to a serious tone, Mr. Harper asks: "In a service-learning setting, how do you think professionalism and etiquette will apply?"

The seniors further prompt freshman's thoughts by asking: "What if people come in and they're rude to you?" Seniors provide examples of people in the community ignoring them as

they were trying to pass out flyers as part of community awareness projects. Each senior seems to have an example of a time when someone was rude or tried to ignore them; one recalls a time when a lady tried to get away from him "like I was trying to sell them crack." The freshman seem to really be thinking about themselves in these roles now and begin to ask a lot of "what if" questions for handling difficult interactions.

To address their concerns, Mr. Harper reviews the golden rule for treating others how you want to be treated. He explains that whenever someone is being rude or disrespectful, you respond by following the golden rule. Mr. Quinn writes a list of etiquette skills on the chalk board. The list includes: responsibility, speaking, dressing, demeanor, golden rule, silver rule, respect, discipline. Mr. Harper asks the freshman to reflect: "What do these words mean to you?"

International service-learning trip. During spring break a group of 13 Grandview students and three staff ventured on a week-long service-learning trip to the Dominican Republic. This included Mr. Harper and Mr. Jackson, along with Ms. Williams. The trip was intended to be "a firsthand lesson on social justice with relevance to educational and economic disparities across the globe." Service activities involved making repairs to dilapidated school facilities as well as tutoring elementary school children. Upon arriving to their service site, students were shocked at the physical state of the school:

. . . all the desks were broken and stuff. The floor was like really, really dirty. All the paint was chipping off and stuff. The school kind of reminded me of an old, old, old house that really needed to be fixed up. And they say out of those two buildings which were probably like the size of probably two of our classrooms. . . it was actually 145

students between both. And I sit here like how do you fit 145 students between these two buildings?

Students had an abundance of opportunities to learn and reflect on the overwhelming poverty they witnessed. When asked to rate the international service experience on a scale of one to 10, Mr. Jackson responded “a 30” while Mr. Harper replied “an overflowing cup 10.” They were greatly impacted by “being somewhere different and experiencing their culture.” Developing relationships with Dominican children was especially fulfilling:

The kids were funny and fun. They like to read a lot and practice their English. They were so eager to practice their English. It was kind of weird because we were so eager to practice our Spanish with them, and they were so eager to practice their English with us. It was like sometimes we weren't on the same page because we wanted to do two different things. And they were like “No, no, no we speak in English.” And I said “No, hablamos en Espanol.” And they said “No.” But we were arguing in each other's languages which helped us even more. And then we would laugh right after. . . . I think that trip was like a big stress reliever. It gave us a lot of time to think about our lives and how much we regret and stuff and how little other people have.

In addition to working at the school, students also helped with a program offered by a non-profit organization for “the kids who couldn't afford to pay 30 or 40 pesos a week or so to go to school.” Students were positioned to consider educational disparities in a country where “most of the students...don't even make it past the sixth or seventh grade.” They explained: “Families usually don't want their children to go to school, because it's like what's the point of going to school? Where's that going to get you in our country?”

Excerpt from a student participant's journal.

I received my first passport two weeks ago and I boarded the first airplane of my life today. I ventured out of my country for the first time and had my passport stamped for the first time. The passport brought with it excitement. Excitement of the possibility of travel. The airplane experience brought with it nostalgia of roller-coasters past. I questioned why I was on the plane and tried to find a justification for why I should disembark. The first stamp on my passport made me feel like I had earned a stripe. A stripe of honor in the battle between staying complacent and stagnant and growth and progression. Entering the Dominican Republic for the first time, I was blown away by the vast differences between what I came to know as my home and a completely different and distinct world that existed out there. It was culture shock. Culture shock in that, the colors of people, the walk, the talk and the sway of hips reminded me of home, yet something in the air was so different, so clean, so organic. Friendliness amongst strangers, people waving to me, greeting me with smiles and intrigue. So much so that, the fear that I had of leaving the convenient and wandering off into the unknown was all erased by the welcome. I look forward to affecting change in this country within its most deserving; underprivileged children. I hope to teach and generate hope, faith and an eagerness to become agents of change themselves.

Participants

Recall that the research participants included Grandview's service-learning coordinator and three students in the twelfth grade. Student participants were selected based on their exceptionality in the service-learning program. At the end of the school year, each of the three students were presented with an award for their outstanding achievement in the service-learning

program, as they each greatly exceeded the service-learning requirement of 100 hours. All participants were African American.

Ms. Candace Williams. As the service-learning coordinator, Ms. Williams was charged with the full responsibility of establishing the school-wide service-learning program. Williams, in her early twenties, recently graduated from a nearby university. A dynamic, intelligent, and quick thinking young woman, she was placed at Grandview through the AmeriCorps VISTA program. AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to “fight poverty with passion” (AmeriCorps, 2012). VISTA members commit to serve full-time for a year at a nonprofit organization in exchange for the experience of making an impact and a modest living allowance. It was clear that Williams’ passion for affecting change herself motivated her dedication to the school and students.

Williams began working at Grandview in August 2010. The 2011-2012 school year, coinciding with this study, marked her second year as service-learning coordinator. Williams’ dedication was evident as she discussed her intention to extend her placement for a third and final year. This would allow Williams to complete the development of the service-learning program, since leaving Grandview with a fully implemented program was very important to her. The final stage of the program development would involve generating teacher investment and ensuring that each class utilized service-learning as an instructional technique. In her temporarily funded position, Williams was constantly aware of the need to devise a self-sustaining program. Therefore, one of Williams’ priorities was to have the service-learning program largely run by students. To do so, she had placed a handful of young men in the lead.

In one of our first conversations, Williams explained the "resiliency" of Grandview students, stating that statistically speaking they should not even be at the school, yet alone

achieving at such high levels. She described the "rich stories" students shared in their recent essay on oppression in their lives, which touched on the abuse and struggles they faced growing up. Williams explained that some of "my guys," as she called them, always cared about service no matter what, even when they were "in the struggle" with problems at school or home. Williams passionately recognized the potential of the students to affect change in their communities and she was gearing the service-learning program to inspire just that. Her greatest hope was that service-learning would support students' development as "civic advocates in tune with the pulse of the community." Graduates, she continued, should have an understanding of the issues that surround their lives in the city.

Just prior to the start of the 2011-2012 school year Williams was asked to teach an elective social justice class for the school's seniors; she enthusiastically embraced this opportunity. Although the social justice class was her first opportunity to teach and she quickly realized the challenges of the classroom, Williams's approach to the content of the class was well developed. During my observations of the class I was impressed by her natural ability to engage students in a fast-paced dialogue that constantly challenged their thinking. In addition to the social justice class, Williams was also responsible for the other components of the service-learning curriculum, including the morning advisory and freshman fraternity sessions, and the international service-learning trip, all while ensuring that each student met or exceeded their service requirement.

Mr. Akeil Harper. From the moment he signed his consent form to participate in the study, Mr. Harper was eager to share his thoughts, insights, and experiences. Harper was a mature and serious student, but more importantly, he was, as he explained, "immersed in

service" in a way that made him much wiser than his 18 years. For him, this was all about making change and his personal ambition to elevate his community.

Harper's path to enrollment at Grandview was unique in that he decided to enroll in the school as a way to, as he said: "build something new up within myself and within my community." His awareness of how the odds were stacked against him served to propel him forward. Harper reflected on his experience as a middle school student when a newspaper article was published about his neighborhood, one of the city's most impoverished:

. . . [The article said] the children from the South End, the grownups from the South End, and anyone coming from the South End, will never get to college, they'll never get out of their town and stuff, saying all this other stuff. And it angered me because I was sitting here like I want to go to college, I'm going, so what are they talking about? It felt like the newspaper threw me under the bus and made me feel less than what I am. And when I saw my friends saying "It probably is true" and we're from the same neighborhood, I sat there like, wow, is that what you think of yourself?

Shortly after this event, an after school program attendant recognized him as exceptional and handed him a pamphlet for Grandview. The attendant relentlessly encouraged Harper to apply to the school, even calling him over the summer. Although initially reluctant, Harper eventually realized that this was his chance to "be a chain that pops in the cycle."

During his senior year Harper held many responsibilities: "service coordinator, school president, frat president, leader of freshman frats, as a mentor, inside the school mentor, outside the school, being involved in the community." He was a top ranked student and also an athlete. However, his success at Grandview was not always certain to him. As a freshman Harper

nearly walked out of Grandview. When I asked him to reflect on who he would have been had he left, he offered:

. . . I would have been like oh, wow, I'm just done; I guess I'm already grown up. But I can do this . . . I'll keep doing this bad stuff then. I don't have anywhere else to go but jail or the streets. I probably would have died I think, if anything. I probably would have been dead, like living life out on the streets.

Not only did Harper stay in the school, he underwent a powerful transformation and emerged as a leader in the school and especially in the service-learning program. At the graduation ceremony, Harper was awarded for the highest number of service hours, 497, in the school.

There were days when Harper was “in the struggle,” as Ms. Williams would say. His frustration was especially visible during the social justice class discussion on the Trayvon Martin murder where he could no longer contain his outrage: “I'm f—ing done. I'm sorry, but I'm done.” During our next interview he explained that his pain was compounded through the death of other teens: “I lost four friends this year . . . two to Black on Black violence . . . one to police brutality, that was my cousin. And my . . . fourth friend, he died in a car crash down South.”

Harper drew clear connections between the homicide of young African American men and larger societal inequalities, an awareness of injustice that was infuriating. To deal with his emotions, Harper shared his daily ritual that enabled his focus:

I actually have a poem posted on my wall, because I really like poetry, called Success, and every time I get up in the morning, I read it. And no matter how bad my day goes, I think back to the poem and I could be as mad as an ox in the summertime [laughs]. I just think of the word success and then I think of the poem and then I start laughing. Or

sometimes I'll sit there and stifle like ugghh, and I'll have a blank face, and I'll sit there and I'll calm down. Because I know what my goals are. I know I need to change like the people in my community and in the world, in the world community.

Motivated by a desire to overcome social injustices, Harper had a big vision for his future. He coolly stated: "I believe I'm going to be mayor, senator, and then president." College was his first priority. He enrolled in the AmeriCorps Young Vista Scholarship program, an opportunity to earn money for college by completing an additional 300 hour service requirement during his senior year. When Harper discussed his acceptance into Morehouse College he beamed with pride: "I prayed to God that I could get into any college...So I don't know...I'm very excited, I'm happy, I'm blessed with that honor, I can't wait to start."

Mr. Marlin Jackson. On my first visit to Grandview, Ms. Williams introduced me to "her right hand man," Mr. Jackson. The student director of the service-learning program, Jackson entered the counseling suite neatly dressed, adding a tie, black cardigan, and a gold ring to the basic senior uniform. On that particular morning he was preparing for a ninth grade homeroom advisory session focused on service-learning. Jackson wrote a list of seniors on his clipboard, assembling them into teams that he would ask to come to school early on Thursday to lead the sessions. As the pair discussed the plans, there was a sense of collaboration and mutual respect. Ms. Williams posed questions to Jackson, soliciting his input she asked: "How are the best classes run?" Jackson insightfully responded: "It depends on the students."

Much of Jackson's responsibility as student director involved recruiting other students for service events. He worked closely with Ms. Williams to identify students, seniors especially, who needed to complete their service requirement. Jackson matter of factly offered: "As long as they all get done, I did my job." Being the student director was often challenging,

especially when dealing with peers who did not value the service-learning program in the way Jackson did. This was frustrating and Jackson had to remind himself of the long-term benefit of his work: “If everyone graduates . . . and they have well over 100 hours of community service . . . that'll bring a lot of attention to the school.”

During our first interview, I asked Jackson how important service-learning was to him on a scale of one to 10; his response: a “20.” While he admitted that when he first came to the school he did not see any point in the service requirement, at the start of his senior year Jackson reported having already completed 120 hours of service. He contended: “And I'm not stopping until I graduate . . . I just feel it's a goal and I like exceeding goals, so that's what I want to do.”

Jackson was academically strong and was enrolled in several advanced placement classes. He explained his approach to academic success:

I treat it like having a job. If you're not doing what you're supposed to be doing at a job, your boss is going to tell you that you need to do better or you're going to get fired. So if you're not doing it, you're going to get a demerit. I do what you're supposed to do at a job.

In addition to the challenging nature of the curriculum, Jackson appreciated the “family surrounding” of Grandview. During basketball season he was often at school until nine in the evening. Jackson did not mind, since Grandview felt like home.

Interestingly, Jackson was not involved in the decision to attend Grandview. He recalled his surprise at suddenly being told he was going to a new, all male high school:

I hadn't even heard of this school. But then like a week before the school started my grandmother and mom had signed me up without even telling me, and then she was like “You've got orientation for school next week.” I was like “I thought I was going to

Schenectady High.” They're like “No, we signed you up for an all boy high school in [the city], we're moving back to [the city].” So at first I was mad about it . . .

He explained that their decision to enroll him in Grandview was due to the bad reputation of other area high schools. In Jackson’s view, these schools were “out of control . . . they just fight and everything; the teachers don't really care . . .”

I asked Jackson to imagine who he would be if he did not have the opportunity to attend Grandview. He offered: “I don’t think I want to know . . . not motivated, undetermined, drop out.” Jackson conceded that school was easy for him during freshman and sophomore years, but junior and senior year “family problems at home” made school much more challenging. Jackson, who lived with his grandmother, explained:

[My biggest challenge was] probably not living with my mom when she moved to New York when I was entering my junior year. I don't have no best friends, not one. But if I had to consider someone, it'd probably be my mother. That was hard trying to deal with that, not being with her and my little brother. I dealt with that, but now I have to deal with it again because she's trying to move to Ohio.

Despite these difficulties, Jackson was awarded for his 425 hours of service at the graduation ceremony. He reflected: “I thought I was going to do just 90 hours and then stop.” Jackson did not stop; in fact it seems that hardships were his motivation:

I like helping out people, so anytime I can help out people it's an achievement. Where I grew up, I seen a lot of people struggle. And a lot of people in my family still struggle. How can I help them and help people that’s just like them? That's what I go for.

Jackson continued that his dedication to the service-learning program also developed from his own experience of not having anyone reach out to him. In particular, he felt he would have benefited from having “a mentor, like probably just someone along side of me as I got older.”

Given his commitments, I was surprised when Jackson often appeared disengaged during social justice class. When I asked him about his experience of the class he clarified that he enjoyed the content of the class but was frustrated by the behavior of his peers: “I hate being annoyed and not being able to work.” On the other hand, the civics component of the class encouraged Jackson. He felt this gave him a more concrete approach for affecting change:

The civics part of it targeted everything that I was thinking about . . . Like everything that I want to do, we talked about it in civics. So I was like how can I help people who can't do this or how can I help people who can't do that? All the ways to go about getting the higher authorities involved with society and stuff . . . rather than just focusing on what's going on in front of them or what they got going on it their heads.

As the school year drew to a close and Jackson prepared to leave for college, I asked him what he would miss most about Grandview. Pointing towards the counseling suite office, he said: “Them three people [the counseling suite staff] in there. They never let you fail They always give you support and back you up in anything you want to do.” Harper and Jackson were also support for each other, and their paths followed similar trajectories.

Although Jackson was president of Grandview’s Howard fraternity and had aims to go there, he decided to also attend Morehouse, along with Harper, and the two planned to be roommates. During his senior year, Jackson also completed additional service hours to earn money for college through the AmeriCorps program; he explained: “It's going to be hard to try to pay for college on my own, since I don't live with either one of my parents and they both don't have a

job right now.” He continued: “They [family] don't want me to leave for college, but I have to.” Jackson intended to study criminal justice and business.

Mr. Naquan Quinn. I first observed Mr. Quinn involved in a heated debate with Grandview’s college counselor. Quinn’s loud exchanges in her office appeared borderline confrontational. As he exited through Ms. Williams's office, she took the opportunity to reprimand him for selling candy in the hallway. Quinn argued back “It’s not illegal to sell candy!” Before he could make it out of the counseling suite, Quinn was stopped by a third staff member who also had a conflict to resolve. All the while his actions were loud and exaggerated—clearly, Quinn enjoyed all the attention and perhaps his overreactions were for my benefit as a new audience.

At first glance, Quinn seemed the most challenging participant to connect with. During our initial meeting, Quinn was distant and avoided eye contact. Although he gave his consent, I quickly began to wonder if he truly wanted to participate in the study. While the other participants would smile and say hello in the hallway, Quinn would ignore me. Eventually, I realized that his behaviors were a way to uphold his image. Even as the study progressed and I felt we had established a solid rapport, Quinn would attempt to shrug me off, grumbling that he had not been involved in any service-learning activities. Once we began talking, it was clear that he had in fact been active in the program, and was attempting avoid the interview.

Quinn was a master of bending the rules and getting away with it. In place of the school uniform, he would often show up to our interviews in street attire or gym clothes: sleeveless t-shirts, basketball shorts, a black du rag. Quinn was a natural salesman; students would go to him for buying used electronics and he was in his glory persuading them to purchase a smart phone or MP3 player. These subtle expressions enabled Quinn to retain his street image, which

gave him a distinguished status. However, he did not tolerate younger students' misconduct and was adept at using his popularity to be a positive influence in the school.

As we talked, it became clear that Quinn's tough guy exterior was just that. He openly expressed his affectionate connection with his teachers: "They're more than just teachers to me. Like they love us, and I love my teachers too." Quinn selflessly extended his compassion to fellow students as well:

I got one of the ninth graders that got the most demerits in the school. I keep him with me, I take him to his classes, see how he's doing, help him with his homework, stuff like that. I don't want him to get in trouble, because I know he's a good kid. Because he's little, so people just antagonize him, so then he gets in trouble . . . I made it my personal business to take care of him.

Quinn selflessly took this student on out of his own good will; an act that was not counted towards his service hours.

Quinn could relate to the problems of this younger student as he too faced many challenges during his freshman year. Like Jackson, Quinn was initially angry about attending Grandview, but the decision was made by a parent who did not see the alternative, public school, as a viable option.

My mom did not want me to go to [the public high school], not at all. She would see it on the news, graduation rates, and she wanted something different for me. So then she heard about Grandview, and she signed me up. I was mad as ever. I was so mad. The first week, whatever, two weeks, I would not say nothin at all cause I was so angry that I was going here.

Despite his resentment, the transition into the school appeared easy for Quinn, he reflected: “I've always had good grades . . . in the ninth grade when I made honor roll, some kid was like “How'd you make honor roll?” Well, I do my work. I may be getting in trouble, but I do my work . . .” His strongest subject was math, specifically calculus. Clearly a fast learner, Quinn boasted: “I don't study at all, at all.”

Academics aside, Quinn felt most strongly impacted by Grandview’s service-learning program. The impact of service on him was not just as a student, but “as a person, as a whole.” In addition to Harper and Jackson, Quinn was also a leader for the freshman fraternity sessions. While the others were occasionally frustrated with the freshman, Quinn never seemed discouraged. He always saw the sessions as positive, he stated:

They're young, they really don't know stuff now, but they hear it from people that they look up to or that they're cool with. Because I'm cool with a lot of the ninth graders, they know me outside of school. So they be like, “He's doing it [service], why can't we do it?”

His work with the freshman sessions, along with a host of other service activities, positioned Quinn to earn an award recognizing his 267 hours of service at the graduation ceremony. After graduation Quinn had plans to attend a state university to study business.

Cross Case Analysis

The role of the qualitative researcher is complex, as they must become deeply involved in the phenomenon being studied (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). My main objective was to become “physically and psychologically” close to the data (Merriam, 1988, p. 68). In this way, I became the research instrument as I detailed the intricacies of participants’ experiences

(Spradley, 1980). Data analysis techniques involved a cyclical process of coding, re-coding, analytic memo writing, and categorizing as detailed by Saldana (2009).

Data analysis revealed a series of processes that student participants simultaneously experienced through their engagement in service-learning. Six themes emerged that seemed to be central to participants' experiences of empowerment and self-authorship. These processes focused on the ways the service-learning curriculum and community engagement experiences interacted with participants' lived experience. Themes took shape from reflection, analytic memo writing, reviewing the codebook, and by sketching graphic organizers to impose structure on categories and codes.

The themes were: "Navigating Oppression," "Resistance," "Forming Community," "The Empowering Practices of Service," "Expanding Identity," and "The Dangers of Sinking." These major themes were built up from the details identified within supporting sub-themes. Figure 2 illustrates the major themes along with their supporting themes that emerged from the data.

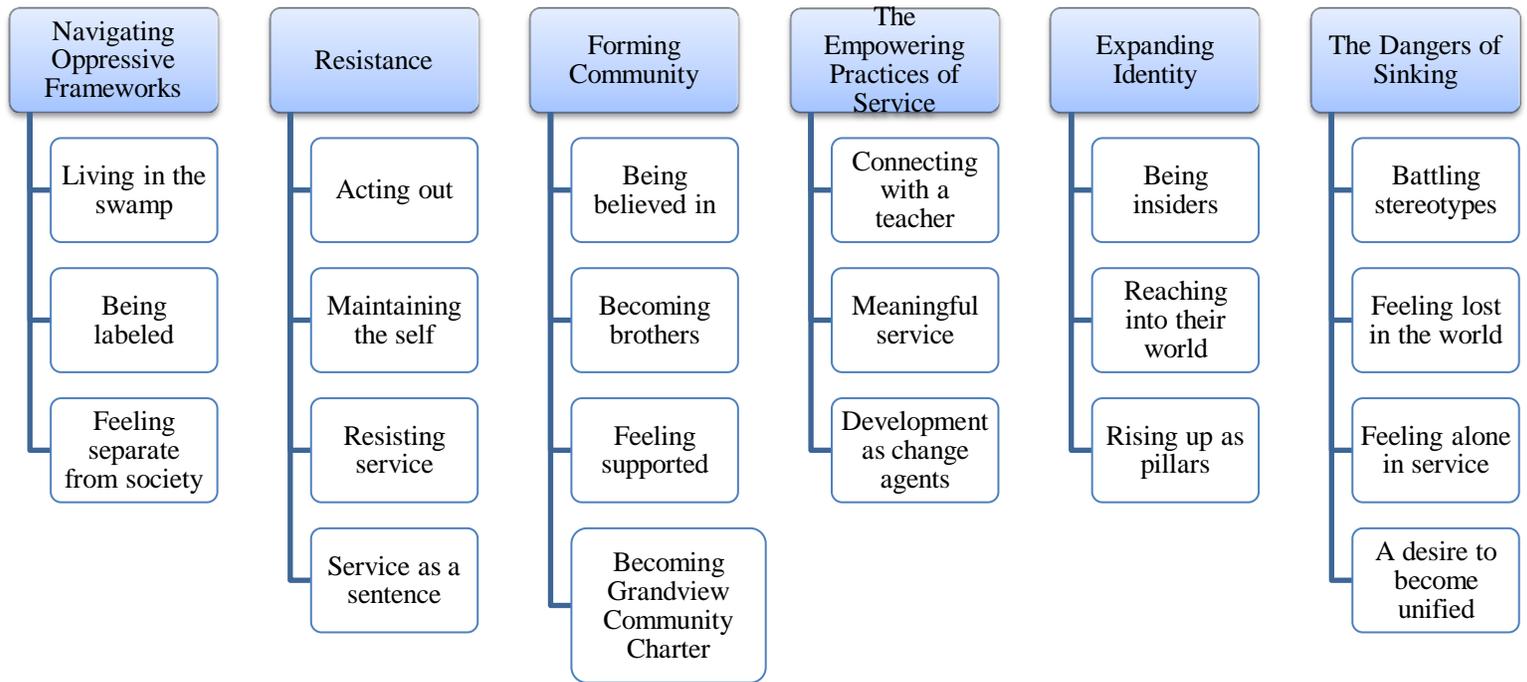


Figure 2. Major themes and supporting sub-themes that emerged through cross-case analysis of data.

Processes of empowerment and self-authorship occurred through the interactions between themes. Each process, as one component of participants' experience, was elemental in their development. Figure 3 depicts the relationships between themes which either served to propel participants towards moments of empowerment and self-authorship or act as a barrier. Although "Navigating Oppressive Frameworks" informed "Resistance," "Forming Community" acted down upon "Resistance" while at the same time enabling "Empowering Practices of Service." The remainder of the processes, with the exception of "The Dangers of Sinking," built up and supported participants engagement in the next, bringing them more fully into an experience of "Expanding Identity." A detailed exploration of the participants' experience of each theme, drawing on text from interview transcripts, field notes, and documents, is presented in the following sections.

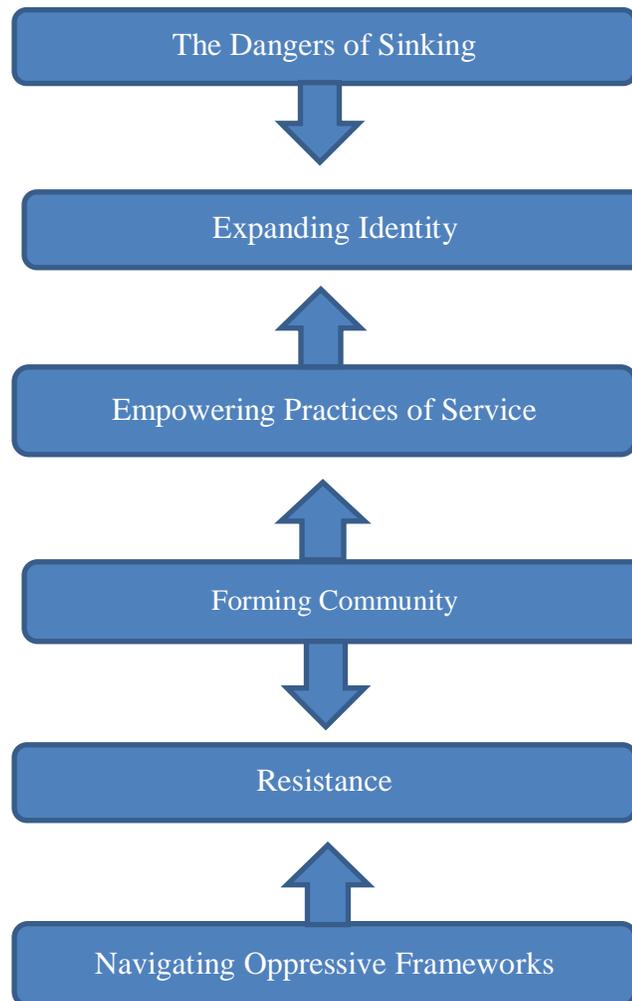


Figure 3. Interactions among themes which supported or acted as a barrier to empowerment and self-authorship.

Navigating Oppressive Frameworks

Participants' depicted their homes and neighborhoods as "pressurized environments," places where "people fall down." It is essential to understand that the entirety of participants' learning through service and the school occurred within a reality framed by oppressive social structures. However, this framework was largely invisible to the participants. Interestingly,

while structural inequalities enabled the crime, violence, and poverty that participants' depicted in the struggles of their families and neighborhoods, they rarely named oppression as such, even though the term was used frequently in the social justice class. Instead participants explained their daily interactions as a constant struggle with things that were "hard to get over."

Living in the swamp. One participant poignantly explained that his neighborhood, the "ghetto," was like "a swamp that engulfs and wears away at everything in it;" it was a place where people "sink." In social justice class he told his peers you can be a positive force "in the ghetto, but it's like a swamp or bog. You'll just end up sinking, you might as well just give up." In our next interview I asked him to elaborate; he continued: "You have the choice to either sink or to stay strong. But either way, the ghetto . . . has some way of always engulfing whatever is in it . . ."

Participants' stories were rich with the ways they encountered "sinking" in their neighborhoods. A central challenge was "mug rapping," a constant barrage of: "You can't do this, oh you're a failure." This dialogue occurred through interactions with peers, but participants also touched on how it was unspoken in the actions of those in power, or perhaps in the ways they were ignored. To participants, the message was clearly conveyed:

. . . they're like I don't care, they think this of me anyway. And as a kid you're influenced by what other people think. What your elders think. If police and fireman come up to and are like "Oh, you're never going to be anything," "Oh, you're gonna be a drug dealer." Stuff like that . . . You know what? I might as well be this because I'm not going to amount to anything anyways.

As we talked about how this dialogue can be communicated non-verbally, the participant concluded “Exactly.” In order to navigate around these dialogues of failure, participants had to be quite resilient; internalizing this dialogue would make sinking inevitable.

Neighborhoods were also “swamps” in that participants witnessed disheartening statistics play out in real life. Not only did they understand how few African American males go to college, they said that they “really see this every day.” Participants explained: “It's really hard to get into college being from my community You don't see older people going to college.” Instead they were accustomed to watching others lose sight of their aspirations at a young age. Participants described others falling victim to the stereotypes, “becoming drug dealers . . . getting locked up.” Participants’ experiences of losing friends to neighborhood violence were especially tragic manifestations of social injustices. Bearing witness to the plight of their peers was another way of sinking as they carried the weight of their shared identity as young African American men in an unjust society.

Being labeled. Labels, in the form of stereotypes and statistics, presented a clear message to participants: they were a problem that needed to be fixed. Statistics on the educational achievement, incarceration, and even homicide of young African American males depicted a staggering view of who participants could hope to become. While the street discourse was one of mug rapping, statistics sharpened the blows, maintaining and supporting street talk with scientific knowledge. In a city where they were grouped into a category where only 47% graduate high school, participants had a well-formed sense that the statistics were stacked against their odds. In this sense, statistics were not just numbers, they had power.

Harper's retelling of his favorite middle school teacher sharing a newspaper report on his neighborhood illustrates his struggle. The article presented the statistics on the neighborhood's educational achievement, concluding, as Harper explained: "Anyone coming from the South End will never get to college." With his hopes to attend college, the article angered Harper:

Basically, I felt as though the newspaper wasn't as positive as I thought it was. Like just project the news to people, unbiased news I thought at the time. Instead it felt like the newspaper threw me under the bus and made me feel less than what I am. And when I saw my friends saying "It probably is true" and we're from the same neighborhood, I sat there like, wow, is that what you think of yourself? It made me feel like I couldn't do anything. And it angered me to a point, because everybody else in my classroom, they were from like two blocks away from the South End, so they weren't considered the South End, they were like right on the cusp of it; and other people from other parts of town were there in my class and it was me and only one of my other friends [who were labeled as being from the South End] Everybody was like "You're from this part of town." And that's where peer pressure comes in, negative peer pressure: "You're not doing this, ha, ha. You grew up here? Oh, that means you're this, that means you're this." So I sit here like, I found it ironic, and I don't know, very wrong. It just got me in throws. It didn't go too good after that. That's when I really started thinking, all these thoughts just coming rapid fast. And then all these people just sitting here keeping track of them, like wow. And now I'm thinking that I have to strive to be better, I have to do this, no, I *have* to do this. I'm not slacking on my homework no more. I have to do this. And now it feels like I'm not just battling the world, I'm battling stereotypes. I'm trying

to break the stereotypes over my community. I'm going to show them that if I can do it, we all can do it. I have to influence the younger kids, I *have* to do this.

The experience of being labeled and feeling like the other in a classroom of peers subsequently led to a drive to flourish. It seems that the effort to reclaim power over his own achievement was a way to confront the newspaper's power. However, feeling like a statistic was also a way of feeling responsible for the problem. Another student described himself as "a part of it," meaning as an African American student he was part of the problem of low educational achievement in the city. As participants were labeled, they adopted a deficiency view of themselves and their neighborhoods.

Feeling separate from society. In many ways, participants were the other. They explained their experiences in a way that highlighted their perception of isolation from mainstream society and its forms of power. Their identities, as individuals and as a school, as racial minorities were central to their sense of separation. A participant continuously referred to the "real world" as though it was separate from his own world, suggesting that it was something to which he had little access. As participants explained that "Minority groups aren't really a part of mainstream society," it was clear that they were aware of their limited access to cultural forms of power.

Exchanges with those viewed as being in the "mainstream society," or dominant culture, confirmed participants' perceptions of isolation. In one instance, a participant encountered the city's mayor:

I see him [the mayor] walking around sometimes, he gives me a smile, a big old cheesy smile, "Hey you want a dollar? Ya, you guys are citizens of this city, so you know . . . so you should vote for me, vote for me. Do you want a dollar? Do you want a dollar?"

Going around asking teenagers if they want a dollar. No, we want our schools to be better though, can you do that?

This participant would have appreciated a genuine conversation with the mayor; instead, he was not taken seriously as a citizen and his identity as an exceptional student with aims to change his community was delegitimized. The interaction served to confirm the perception of being overlooked by politics, yet another way of being separate from society.

Participants' notions that the service-learning program would remedy their shortcomings, i.e., their separation from mainstream culture, were unsettling:

I believe it's a good program [service-learning] because being from a predominately African American and Hispanic background, most of the students belong to minority groups as dubbed by mainstream society. It gives us a chance to actually see what the real world is like and how that works. And it also puts us in a mainstream setting, so we can figure out how to work and like, I don't know, figure out how to be productive in a mainstream society . . .

Through this lens, participants described their learning as though it was removed from the mainstream educational system. The underlying message was that they were culturally deficient as participants' experiences of separateness translated into feeling less than.

Summary. Participants' reflections of their experiences of navigating oppression were torn between two conflicting interpretations. While they linked the experiences of growing up in the ghetto to larger societal inequities, they were also drawn into the dominant paradigm that points the blame to personal deficiencies. From participants' perspectives, sinking or standing strong in the swamp seemed to be a choice left up to the individual, supporting the illusion that students are accountable for their success or failure in an unjust system; as it was said, "You

have the choice to either sink or to stay strong.” At the same time, however, these experiences powerfully informed participants’ recognition of the need for social change. Encountering injustices and navigating oppressions enabled participants to see dynamics of race and power at work in everyday situations.

Clearly, participants’ ideas were not fully formed, but developing within the murky intellectual ground between two opposing interpretations of self and society. It was unclear whether they were presenting a hegemonic view of self or just a stark reality that the burden was on them to find new ways of being in order to gain entry into a supposed real world. This inner debate was not one participants appeared conscious of. These experiences, along with their unconscious interpretations, informed participants’ actions in the school.

Resistance

When participants entered the school, graduation seemed uncertain and they looked back on themselves as "not motivated, undetermined, drop out." They had internalized their experience of being immersed in problems in the city, being labeled as less than, and feeling like the other. As a result, participants projected these experiences onto their own futures, interpreting the problems of the neighborhoods as the result of individual deficiencies. Their depictions of a future they felt was already written were eye-opening: "We were in a trance that we were going to jail." As participants entered the school that first year they brought with them unacknowledged inner dialogues that told them: "You can't do this, oh you're a failure." This inner dialogue remained unacknowledged and un-critiqued throughout the resistance process.

Participants’ transition into Grandview was difficult; as the school culture opposed participants’ street culture, they experienced the challenge of being in limbo between two colliding ways of being. Participants explained that at first the only thing that made them feel

comfortable in the school was the “street atmosphere of all the kids from different neighborhoods.” They resisted the school ways of being that conflicted with their street culture and identity. Resistance was participants’ struggle against Grandview and it seems that this was as much an effort to maintain the self as it was to confront school based forms of power. The wall of resistance (Figure 4) depicts participants’ fight to maintain and separate their identities of self from the colliding school culture.

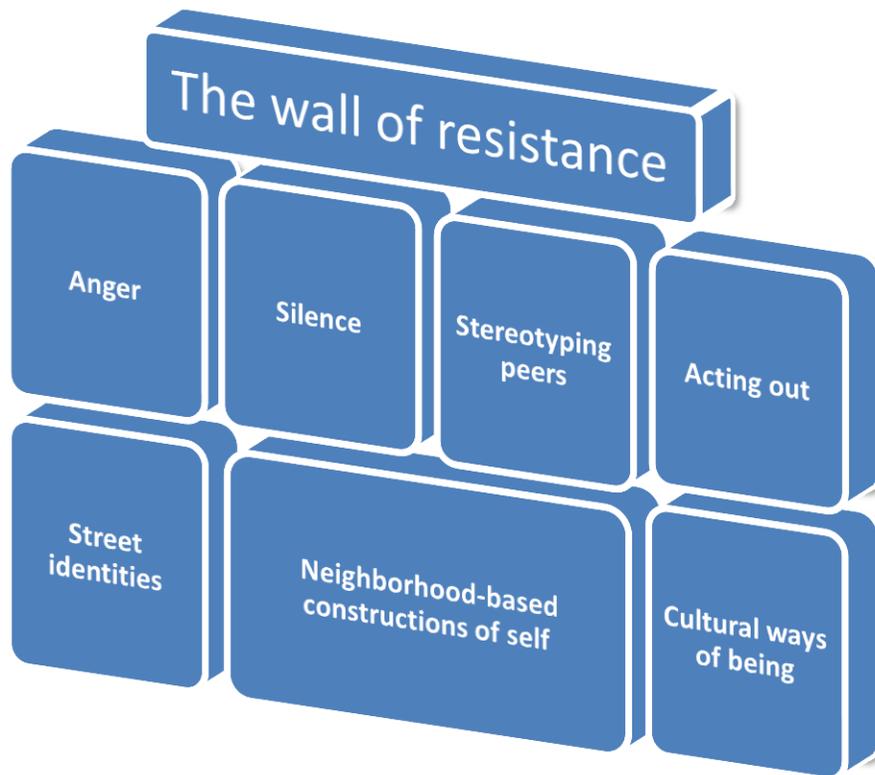


Figure 4. The wall of resistance, representing participants’ struggle to maintain identities of self separate from the school culture. The top tier of the wall consists of the behaviors participants utilized to express their resistance while the lower tier of the wall depicts the facets of participants’ identities they struggled to defend.

Acting out. The top tier of the wall of resistance is constructed of blocks that represent the ways participants attempted to maintain their resistance, through anger, acting out, silence, and stereotyping their peers. Participants' explained how their resistance was expressed when they first enrolled in the school: "I would not say nothin' at all cause I was so angry." They also detailed how they had a bad attitude, argued with teachers, and acted like a "hot head." Participants reported that they acted out because they "weren't used to a stable setting" and thought that teachers attempts to convey care and concern were just a way that they "were playing" with them.

It seems that participants' anger was a shell, a mechanism for defense in a new environment. Participants not only engaged in resistance against the school norms and teachers, but also against their peers by holding stereotypes against each other and forming neighborhood-based cliques. The behaviors of the top tier of the wall of resistance served as defense mechanisms that isolated the self by keeping others out and disabling any attempts to establish trust and respect. Their actions speak to the vulnerability and uncertainty they must have experienced during the transition into the school culture.

Maintaining the self. The lower tier of the wall of resistance represents what participants were fighting to maintain: neighborhood-based constructions of self, street identities, and cultural ways of being, since the ways of being in the school conflicted with participants' neighborhood-informed identities. Essentially participants' attempts were an effort to maintain the self, as these forms of identity were direct products of their lived experience. This conflict had one participant at a "breaking point" where he felt forced to make a decision:

We had black shirts the first year, and I had some khakis on and some shoes. And it was my first time ever being like neat and fashionable. So I felt the tight shirt and all this

other stuff I was wearing, I felt as though the shirt was tight, but it was fit, it was proper, so I felt uncomfortable in it. The only thing that made me feel comfortable in the school was like, I don't know, should I say like the street atmosphere of all the kids from different neighborhoods walking around. Which had me at a breaking point . . . like should I go? Should I leave? And I'm standing next to the door with my three friends. They're saying "We're doing whatever you do, bro." So I looked at them, then I looked at the cafeteria, then I looked out the door . . . I'm sitting here like we gotta get up out of here. We have to get out of [the city]. I didn't know what to do yet, but I think that was the breaking point. So I went into the cafeteria and they followed me. Later on they got kicked out for other reasons, inexplicable, but . . . I was that close to leaving.

However self-limiting, leaving the school would have been the ultimate sacrifice to defend street identity. Many students did leave during that first year, whether seemingly due to personal choice or being "kicked out" as participants described. It appears that participants' success was dependent on their ability to negotiate a compromise between self and school identities.

Resisting service. Before participants became willing to participate in service, they first had to navigate their own inner barriers. As a part of their struggle against the school culture, participants resisted the service program during their first year at Grandview. Service to their community and school was perceived as a pointless waste of time and participants "just didn't want to do it." However, the service requirement was clear; participants recalled the principal's words: "You have to do it before you graduate, or I'm not handing you your diploma at graduation."

Eventually, participants became willing to try service, albeit extrinsically motivated: "I was like I didn't want to do it, but then I was like I might as well do it since it's a requirement at

the school." Still, service was perceived as an empty requirement to be met and participants described how they resigned to the fact that there was no way around it. Once actual service opportunities were presented to them, participants became more willing to participate, which helped to shift their perceptions and they began to think it would be simple for them to accomplish the 100 hour requirement. Believing it would be easy, participants espoused an "I guess I can do it" attitude, but service still remained a meaningless obligation. Their plan was to simply complete the minimum requirement: "I thought I was going to do just 100 hours and then stop."

Service as a sentence. Dynamics of race and power were also at play within participants' resistance to the service-learning program. This involved confronting a culturally dominant paradigm that equates community service with punishment. Quinn encountered this view in his interactions with peers. He explained that the perception was: "Thinking that you gotta commit a crime to do community service." Harper especially offered an interpretation of the service requirement that highlighted an ideological conflict with his lived experience:

I know a lot of people, like older men that got imprisoned, and they were sentenced to do community service. So I'm sitting here like wow, is . . . it because I'm of Black origin or like African American? Is this why she's saying this? I know this sounds ignorant, but I was just uninformed at the time. I sat here like wow, so I felt kind of disrespected, like less than myself since she said community service. I sat here like wow, community service. I'm not doing any community service.

It is important to note that in this instance the program was introduced to Harper as community service, and the important pedagogical differences of Grandview's program were not clarified. Regardless, he felt sentenced to do service upon entering the school. The result was his firm

conviction not to engage in the program which he initially interpreted as an oppressive, racially charged mandate.

Although Harper clearly excelled in Grandview's service-learning program, completing more service hours than anyone in the school, he did not forget the negative connotations surrounding the term "community service." When he explained "I don't like to say community service," his awareness of race and class dynamics at work within language was clear. Instead, Harper continued, he was always very deliberate in using the term "service-learning."

Summary. Reflecting on these initial interactions in the school, participants saw themselves at fault for being "young minded, dumb, immature." Student interpretations of their resistance consisted of blaming themselves for the disconnect between school and cultural ways of being. Looking back, participants described themselves as limited by a neighborhood mentality and linked their challenges to personal traits, not larger social phenomenon. One participant offered: "I was just me."

In the process of resistance, participants' ways of being demonstrated their resiliency in an effort to maintain the self, even as their unconscious interpretations of self were informed by oppressive frameworks. The identities participants fought to maintain through resistance were not self-directed, but rather blind constructions. Participants were not conscious of the sources that informed their identity and therefore had not considered how these views served them.

Forming Community

The formation of community was pivotal to participants' experiences in the school, prompting their engagement in several transitional processes and ultimately enabling their self-directed academic and inner development, as well as their complete commitment to the service-learning program. On the way to becoming community, participants experienced a transition that

started with their previously detailed resistance to the school culture. A series of powerful interactions with school staff as well as their peers gave root to new potential and participants' rose up as leaders and promoters of the school. The formation of community demonstrates a merging of initially opposing identities: self and school. Participants engaged in the following processes as they constructed community within the school.

Being believed in. At the beginning of the participants' freshman year, the school principal, Mr. Groves, led an orientation. Participants recounted his central message: "You are so powerful." This pivotal exchange began to shift participants' ways of seeing themselves within the school, as well as society, as they began to develop an awareness of the visions they held for themselves:

And then Mr. Groves comes in here: "Oh, don't you see what you can do, you're so powerful. Oh your mind is beautiful. What are you doing? Why can't you just sit down and look at yourself? What do you want to do? What do you want to be when you're older?" Most of us were like we're going to jail. Don't you see me going to jail? We were in such a mindset that we were going to jail and nobody could break us out of it. I still don't know how he broke us out of that, that mindset. It was like we were in a trance that we were going to jail. Everybody. Every student. Even like the Caucasian students that came from our neighborhoods knew they were going to jail. So it wasn't just a Black thing or a Latino thing, it was a [city] thing, I guess.

Mr. Groves's words demonstrated his belief in Grandview's students' potential by valuing them as powerful individuals with the ability to affect change even as they sat there in anger and resistance. As they recognized Mr. Groves's conviction, the study participants explained how they became willing to listen and consider his perspective on their place in the school.

Participants detailed how Mr. Groves told them of the power they possess to change the world. Participants smiled as they recounted how he compared them to Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, exclaiming: "You're just as powerful as them now . . . they changed everything." As participants were called out to live up to the legacy of these leaders, they explained how they were told that they could all take strides with a social issue, starting with succeeding in school and earning a high school diploma.

This key moment, which occurred four years prior to our discussions, initiated a challenge to the limitations participants felt were upon them, spurring a critical reflection on the status quo and their place in it. Participants' reflections illuminated a sense of truth they not only heard, but felt deep within them, prompting the beginning of an inner shift. Participants explained: "The word stereotype just broke in my head," and "It made me want to be different as a person." The door to new potential seemed to have opened:

Mr. Groves . . . he was talking about how passionate he is about us and he wants us to graduate and how much he cares about us. He made me see everything differently It really opened up my eyes. What he was saying was really getting to me, it made sense. I understand everything he was saying and where he was coming from.

Participants reported that after reflecting on Mr. Groves's speech they began to grapple with "what I can become and what I can do." Harper, who nearly walked out of the school, reminisced on the emotions he felt that day: "I felt like I was lacquered in success."

It seems as though the participants were able to glimpse their potential to overcome the status quo. However, they explained that many of their peers reacted differently, stating that the principal was "just preaching" and that it is "the same junk everywhere." Many of them did not make it through the first year. The study participants were perhaps unique in that they heard the

principal's message, felt touched by it, and were ultimately able to apply it in order to adapt to the school culture.

Becoming brothers. Participants' development of relationships with their peers within the school was a key component that enabled growth. While at first students refused to talk to each other, they eventually began to open up once they felt safe and supported in the Grandview environment. Participants explained how being in the school became more tolerable once they started relating to other students. As friendships were forged, participants described how they moved beyond the notions they held against each other:

So we had a lot of stereotypes about each other, until we started talking to each other, that's when we stopped fearing each other, stopped fearing and got to know each other. We actually built rapport with each other, and then built relationships. And now we embrace each other as like brothers and stuff. So, we broke all the stereotypes. We see people for who they really are.

Participants felt as though they belonged and found brotherhood. "I see them as my brothers now" was the resounding theme.

A shared set of life experiences allowed students' brotherhood to develop naturally as they felt that they "all have a similar situation" and are able to "understand each other." Participants understood the obstacles they each had to overcome and were united in that "we all want to make it together" in creating a new path for their lives. Quinn explained:

So I think it's a good thing to be around [the other Grandview students], cause when we're not here, we're around a whole bunch of people that are not doing nothing with their life. We set goals for each other. We counsel each other. We strive, we compete with each other. We do everything together.

Their common experience of striving to succeed in school also built camaraderie. Participants described how they pushed each other forward and kept "each other out of trouble." There was a strong sense of cooperation in their interactions and participants demonstrated a commitment to not let their brothers fail.

Feeling supported. Developing caring, supportive relationships with Grandview's teachers and staff was extremely valuable to participants in myriad ways. This critical piece involved participants' realization that the teachers loved and cared for each student, which powerfully shifted their relationship to the school:

The first year was a little rowdy But then like the second year, we really figured out that they really did love us, care about, and really did care about our education. That's when we really started to reach for like goals, like oh ya college is possible. We didn't believe in ninth grade, but we started more so believing in tenth grade. It became like, college became like not an option: "It's not an option you are going, it's not an option you are going." And it became more college oriented stuff.

Relationships were a source of motivation. Participants described how their full engagement in the school was nurtured by their teachers' support and reassurance that they would not fail. Teachers also provided the challenge participants needed to push themselves forward. The college preparatory culture conveyed teachers' beliefs in the abilities and resiliencies of the participants who felt labeled as unfit for higher education.

Even Quinn, with his tough exterior, was not shy about their meaningful connection. He affectionately stated: "They love us, and I love my teachers too." Participants knew that each one of them mattered in the eyes of their teachers. Participants understood that their teachers would check in with them if they noticed something out of the ordinary, explaining: "They can

tell you from when you are yourself to when you're not. That's how good they know us."

Teachers didn't let students slip through the cracks and participants found this reassuring:

Teachers help you with your work. Talk to the teacher. If you have personal problems, you talk to the teacher about it too. It's like they are there for you in different ways. Like if I'm stressed, they're asking me "What's wrong?" They're trying to get to it and give me some good advice or say something that's going to make me feel better. Like this morning, I walked inside band, usually I go straight to my keyboard and start playing it or whatever, but I was just sitting there. And then my teacher came straight to me and took me out in the hallway, and was like "What's wrong with you? You don't look like yourself."

Over time participants knew that their teachers cared about their education and felt supported in knowing they could go to any teacher and ask for help because, as participants explained: "They all care about me and my grades, just like I do." While at first participants had to learn how to ask for help, they soon felt that their teachers were there for them all hours of the day and into the evening. In fact, each teacher had a cell phone that students could call. Participants went to teachers with not only school related issues, but personal problems as well. Feeling supported through these networks with their teachers was a new experience that conveyed value and respect, and ultimately enabled students to flourish in the school.

Becoming Grandview Community Charter. Participants became Grandview in the sense that they re-wrote identities of self that were synergistic with the values and culture of the school. This occurred as three processes, "Being Believed In," "Becoming Brothers," and "Feeling Supported," merged through every day interactions. Figure 5 displays the convergence that positioned participants to begin to see new possibilities taking shape in their lives.

Participants explained that with the supportive push of teachers and peers, their inner dialogue became one with that of the school. College became a reality as they "started to reach for goals." Expressions of trust and respect within the school culture were instrumental in enabling participants' identity development. From here, community effortlessly evolved.

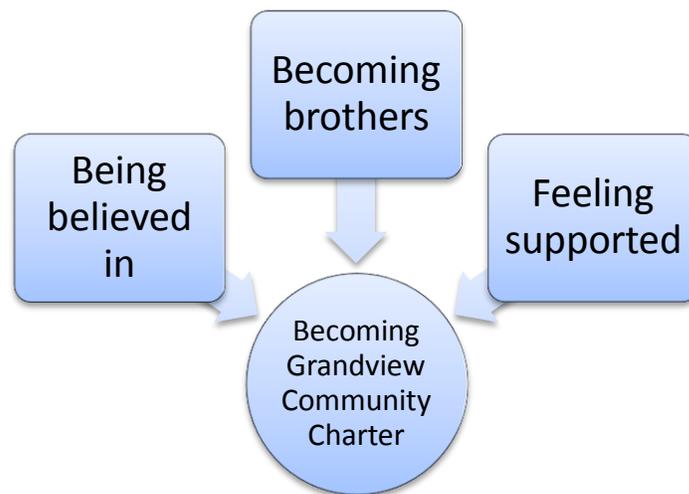


Figure 5. Becoming Grandview Community Charter was a way of rewriting identity that resulted from the convergence of being believed in, becoming brothers, and feeling supported through school interactions.

Participants demonstrated unity with the school culture. They expressed a merging self and school identities as they intertwined their own ambitions with Grandview's motto: "I'm on a mission to elevate myself, my community, and humanity." As Harper continued "I believe in that," it was clear that the motto became a powerful extension of self. Participants demonstrated the embodiment of the school culture through their focus, drive, and dedication to academic achievement as a way to, as they said: "uplift me, uplift my school, and benefit my community."

Participants explained that they saw themselves opening doors to the future. Being immersed in the college oriented curriculum and school culture of achievement served to

override participants' self-limiting inner dialogues. This was demonstrated through participants' self-motivation as they continuously challenged themselves academically. Participants, who once thought they had few options in life, had "ivy league picks" for the colleges they hoped to attend. Furthermore, it seemed that it was not just a coincidence that Harper, president of school's Morehouse fraternity, was accepted into Morehouse College.

Participants viewed themselves as advocates for the school; they contended: "We're like college recruiters for Grandview." Participants explained: "When there's something that the school needs help with, or when someone asks about our school, we always tell them about how good our school is." Their eagerness to promote Grandview also revealed a merger of purpose between the student and the school. As seniors, participants welcomed and introduced younger students into Grandview culture, encouraging their peers to seriously think about their education and the value of high school and beyond. In this way, participants were not just products of the school culture, but were co-creators, contributing to and advancing Grandview's mission.

To participants, being Grandview meant having the confidence and leadership to stand up for their values and taking personal responsibility for change, no matter how small. For example, Quinn described how he would intervene if he observed his peers becoming rowdy:

If I was walking down the hall and I see two kids play fight, it don't matter. You're not supposed to do that at school, I'll stop it, I'll break it up. I don't work for Grandview, but still, I still stop it. And I tell them we don't do that at Grandview, we're brothers, that's what I do.

As participants were self-directed in holding their peers accountable for representing Grandview's values, they demonstrated that they incorporated these principles into their own ways of being.

Participants not only internalized what Grandview stands for, but they also expressed a sense of pride for their merged and expanded identity with the school. Enrollment at Grandview was viewed as a status that involved development of formal ways of speaking and engagement in rigorous academics; they essentially felt that it was: "like a private school education."

Participants detailed how Grandview "is its own sub-culture" and proudly explained that "people know we're from [Grandview]." Being recognized as Grandview students was described as a self-confirming experience as others acknowledged participants' growth and development.

Deconstructing resistance. Through the processes of forming community, participants engaged in a deconstruction of their resistance. In its place, a self-directed vision of themselves and their futures emerged. The wall of resistance previously presented (Figure 4) represents a state of non-community. In considering how community was formed, it is helpful to view participants' experiences as elemental in breaking down the wall. In this sense, the essence of community was rooted in more a conscious awareness of self.

As participants were uplifted by their principal's message, they became conscious of their inner dialogue of self-defeat. At the same time they glimpsed the power they possessed to direct their own lives. This process was furthered by constructing a supportive network with peers and teachers based in a self-directed vision of the future. Through these acts, participants' line of defense, the top tier of the wall of resistance, was crumbled. The wall was further deconstructed as participants became unified with the school. By merging identities, the bottom tier of the wall, in which student identity was based in a deficiency view of their neighborhoods, was reconceived.

Summary. Coming into the school, participants viewed themselves as confined to the day to day realities of their streets and neighborhoods. They felt trapped by the statistics and

stereotypes of being African American teenagers in a city characterized by poverty and crime. The formation of community transcended participants' limited views of self. Grandview's "family surrounding," as participants stated, enabled the construction of a self-directed dialogue for success. United as brothers, participants were accountable for each other. Teachers too were an essential support network; participants assuredly offered: "If someone is struggling, someone is helping them." As community was constructed, participants experienced a merger of purpose with the school, greatly shifting their identities as learners, and enabling a self-directed vision of self to develop.

Participants saw the school as a movement in that they perceived Grandview's attainment of goals as a challenge to the status quo. Quinn suggested that if more schools gave students the experience of Grandview, the city "would be a way better place." He proposed that the approach to community formation within the school could be replicated elsewhere, offering a way to replenish the city. Participants viewed their achievements as well as that of the school as tied to broader social issues, especially discrepancies in the city's educational achievement of students of color. As members of Grandview's first class, participants considered themselves pioneers in impacting their city. They optimistically looked forward, anticipating the achievements of future Grandview graduates.

The Empowering Practices of Service

While participants were engaged in forming community, they were also experiencing growth through service-learning, and development in one area supported growth in the other. Although the service-learning program was initially met with resistance, the process of forming community was central to moving participants beyond their barriers. The empowering practices of service fueled participants' transition into the program, and their internal dialogue progressed

from I don't want to do this, to I have to do this, to this is meaningful to me, to this is informing my world view. These practices, detailed in this section, placed the student at the center of service, so that they experienced relevant learning and community action as they impacted their communities, while at the same time engaging in powerful growth themselves. As in forming community, participants' transformative progression began with meaningfully connecting with a teacher.

Connecting with a teacher. Participants' accounts highlighted the importance of their close relationships with teachers active in the service-learning program. The potential of student-teacher relationships cannot be understated, since a trusting relationship was central to participants' shift away from their view of service as an empty requirement. Dedicated to service themselves, the faculty member was a role model and inspiration who demonstrated the significance of community work.

As various service and other opportunities became available, teachers recruited the students they knew best. Participants felt valued in the eyes of the faculty member as they were personally asked to help with action projects. The relationships were based in mutual respect; both student and teacher experienced a sense of knowing that they were there for each other. Quinn explained: "So I'm always with [the teacher], every time he needs me, like every time he needs some help, he calls me because he knows I'm with him." At the same time, Quinn detailed, the teacher benefitted by having a student that he could "count on" that would be engaged in the work and would "have ideas" on how to make an impact in the community.

Relationships served to build participants' confidence to venture into new service opportunities. Trust was a core element that was instrumental in positioning participants to step

into new roles and teachers' encouragement provided participants with the courage to engage in unfamiliar activities. Again, Quinn described his experience:

He [the teacher] took me on Because I really don't go nowhere. He exposed me to different things that I usually wouldn't do. He took me to the Adirondacks. He took me kayaking. It's a lot of stuff that I usually would not want to do I went fishing with [the teacher] in Long Island. It was fun. He took me kayaking at 4 o'clock in the morning. And I don't like water, so surprisingly I was in a kayak by myself, fishing. He taught me how to do it. And it was a big size lake. I paddled all the way around it. Stopping, trying to catch fish. Seen bats [laughs] We camped out for two days. I never thought I'd be sleeping in a tent . . . I'm not the kind of person who is just gonna go camp out.

Once they gained service experience alongside a teacher, participants had the confidence to engage in service-learning opportunities independently. Additionally, student-teacher connections served as a catalyst that spurred a series of transformational experiences that drew participants deeper into service. Figure 6 illustrates how connecting with a teacher prompted participants' engagement in a succession of meaningful practices that were profoundly impactful. The meaningful aspects of service-learning are detailed in the following section.

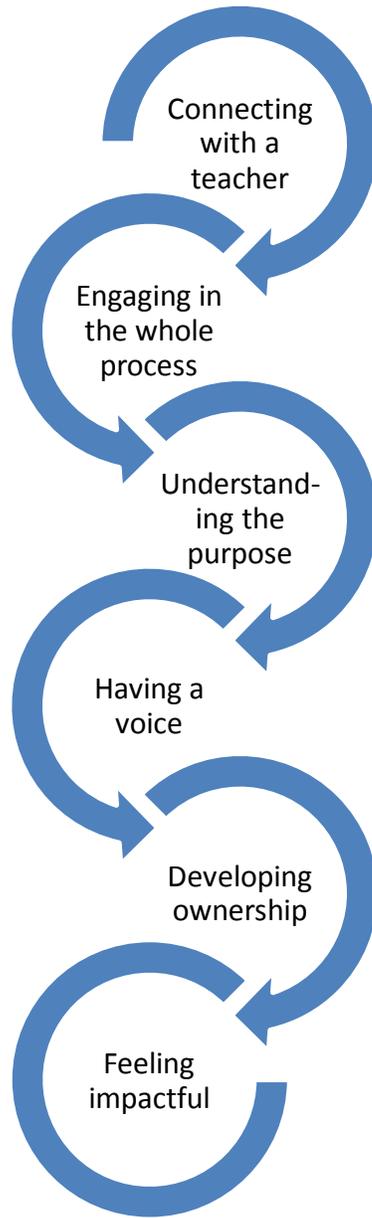


Figure 6. The components of meaningful service resulted from student-teacher relationships and provided rich opportunities for learning and growth.

Meaningful service. Participants' engagement in genuine and meaningful service to their communities was empowering. High quality service experiences provided rich opportunities for learning and growth through five key components. Participants' accounts highlighted the following practices that constituted a meaningful service experience:

- Engaging in the whole process: Participants were involved in all stages of their service projects, immersing them in an array of responsibilities and roles.
- Understanding the purpose: Participants developed an awareness of social issues and understood how their service activities addressed these needs.
- Having a voice: Participants had the opportunity to contribute their knowledge through service activities and service was an avenue for expressing their motivations for social change.
- Developing ownership: Participants were invested in the service activities they engaged in.
- Feeling impactful: Participants felt responsible for creating positive change in their communities.

Engaging in the whole process. Being fully engaged in all aspects of service initiatives involved developing an understanding of community challenges, identifying solutions, and taking action to implement changes. Participants gained first-hand experience in approaching social problems as they not only engaged in physical work, but were involved in researching, planning, interviewing, attending meetings, assessing weaknesses, and identifying ways to strengthen projects. Quinn's work with the city's community gardens involved him in every step of the process, starting with attending the Outdoor Nation Summit in Brooklyn where Grandview's group proposed the idea for the gardens, explained their community's challenges,

and were awarded funding. Quinn shared his community's struggle as a "food desert" and the rationale for the community garden:

A food desert is a place that has no healthy food. It's not a place that don't have food, it's just a place that's not surrounded by healthy food. So there's probably like a Price Chopper across town or something. A lot of people don't have cars that travel over there. So they usually eat unhealthy food...

After receiving the funding, Quinn completed a large part of the physical labor of establishing a garden in a vacant lot and also witnessed the final stage, as community members received fresh, free produce.

Understanding the purpose. Being granted higher level responsibilities, rather than just the physical actions of service, demonstrated respect to students. As a result of being involved in every step of the work to uplift their communities, participants developed their own understanding of the purpose of their work. It was clear to participants how each task they engaged in through service was a way to remedy not only immediate problems, but also impact broader goals for social change. Participants were able to identify how services offered by non-profits served to remedy inequities by providing resources to those without access to them. This was especially clear as participants described the lack of education opportunities in the Dominican Republic and how the non-profit they partnered with enabled greater access through their programs.

Importantly, participants also possessed an overall awareness of the ultimate goal of service, which they described as to "empower our community." Participants in the social justice class were able to draw connections between the role of service-learning and the course, viewing

them as complimentary acts towards social change. Participants engaged in and understood critical thought as an aspect of service oriented towards creating change. Jackson explained:

If you see there's a problem in your society, like how we're doing in social justice class, how the Civil Rights Movement was something huge that helped out the Black, or African Americans I think if you see a problem in [the city], where most of us live, then you see that there needs to be change there, then we can have something like the Civil Rights Movement or something different that will help bring change to that aspect of [the city].

Having a voice. Participants not only understood the purpose of their service, but had a say in the program. The service-learning program valued participants' opinions and encouraged their input. The participants in this study were in many ways co-creators of the service-learning program. As the newly developing program took shape, the service-learning coordinator relied on participants' opinions and as a result, it was clear that their voice mattered. As leaders in the service-learning program they attended meetings with the staff and brought "their voice into the meetings." They felt they had the ability to "put in the ideas that students want to see." Participants were regularly observed in the counseling suite engaged in discussion with the service-learning coordinator. They were collaborators in these conversations, providing direction, as well as input on goals and approaches. The opportunity to have a voice was instrumental in permitting participants to have a space where they could draw on their life experiences and cultural forms of knowledge. Empowering moments occurred as participants' voice was valued.

Service experiences in the community also provided participants with empowering moments where their perspectives mattered. Service-learning opportunities that encouraged

student input demonstrated respect. Participants served on panels where they shared their experiences with younger students. Service opportunities such as the Outdoor Nation Summit encouraged student voice as they collaborated with others to generate ideas. In service roles that involved interacting with the public, participants' voice was instrumental in initiating a community discussion, as they shared their viewpoints, spread awareness of local campaigns, and answered community members' questions.

Developing ownership and feeling impactful. Having voice in the program was a way of developing ownership as participants helped to set goals for service program. Participants' experience of ownership was a way of feeling invested in positive community change. They were personally committed to the success of these community and school-based efforts. By having ownership, participants felt that they were contributing to the development of the school's service program. Beyond feeling responsible for isolated acts of service, participants felt impactful in the sense of driving broader social change in their city. Harper explained: "It's one thing to serve, but if you want to make an impact, it's even harder. It's like school, there's a difference between knowing and understanding." Participants' sense of impact developed through their experiences as real-world, hands-on problem solvers. As participants engaged with and addressed problems through service they developed a sense responsibility for a success in the community. An understanding that service should be about making a change informed this process.

Participants' common message was clear: "I feel as though I'm making change." In addition to feeling impactful as individuals, participants saw the entire school making an impact in the community through service and enabled "everyone to live better." Participants explained that if they were all active in their section of the city a big impact could be made: "It's enough of

us living all over [the city], so if we all take part in our own community. And eventually all the parts come together.” Experiencing positive change amidst challenging circumstances, and just “doing something” to make a difference, gave participants a great sense of hope.

Development as change agents. As members of a supportive community, participants were positioned to engage in transformative work. Through the experience of the meaningful practices of service, participants’ motives and identities were deeply impacted. This involved development into competent, compassionate community members and students through new and challenging opportunities and roles. Students who in the ninth grade planned to only meet the minimum 100 hour service requirement explained that once they reached that mark they “just didn't want to stop” and committed “I'm not stopping until I graduate.” Driven by an authentic desire to affect change, participants emerged as leaders in the school.

As participants developed an eagerness to participate in service as a result of their relationships with teachers, they were chosen for advanced service-learning opportunities. These were often mentally stimulating opportunities, made available to only select students that involved going to new places, meeting people, and opening up doors that would not otherwise be a part of their life without service. As participants experienced the excitement of traveling to other cities, states, and in one case a foreign country, they concluded that service-learning “can take you out of [the city]” to “see new things in the world.” Interacting with diverse people was pivotal—participants’ worlds widened as they connected with youth from other states, college students and young adults who worked with non-profits, as well as local community leaders.

Jackson and Harper were selected to attend a week-long service-learning trip to the Dominican Republic. Being immersed in the country's culture, people, and language was eye-opening as they realized the Dominican Republic offered a different way of being in the world.

Jackson and Harper portrayed it as a community-based culture where they felt welcomed, valued, and embraced; quite the contrast to what they were accustomed to in their city. Jackson described a feeling of safety in the city they visited: "You don't have to worry about anything happening." At the service site, a Dominican school, participants were inspired by the children who were happy, respectful, and eager to learn. This experience not only brought them into contact with a new culture, but was "a big stress reliever." Jackson and Harper explained that they were more child-like, affectionate and outgoing, able to hug and play with the children. They seemed to consider the Dominican Republic a living demonstration of a distinct approach to life. Participants concluded that the difference was community: "The whole island is like a family," they "pass it forward out of the kindness of their own hearts." Jackson and Harper exhibited joy and a sense of hope in this discovery.

The service-learning trip to the Dominican Republic, as well as other advanced opportunities, was instrumental to participants' development. Growth as change agents occurred as participants stepped into new and challenging roles, acquired the competencies needed to engage in community work, and cultivated a compassionate outlook. Through these shifts, participants developed an inner drive to uplift their communities through service, advancing their status as leaders in the school.

Being pushed out of their comfort zone. Venturing off into advanced service-learning opportunities enabled participants to expand their visions of self. Doing service was synonymous with stepping out of the normal routine. Participants learned to embrace new people, places, and responsibilities even when they did not feel confident in doing so. Service pushed participants out of their comfort zone and, as they stated, into "a lot of stuff that I usually would not want to do." This included challenging, unfamiliar, or even intimidating situations

such as being away from home, out in nature, stepping into leadership roles, interacting with people, and public speaking.

Opportunities to express their views on social issues were especially uncomfortable. Harper described his moment of anxiety before speaking to a crowd: "My heart pulsed, felt like it ripped apart and then came back together." He continued that as he spoke about injustices in his neighborhood, he encountered self-doubt and questioned his own views and his ability to express them. In the end, Harper felt that critiquing himself was beneficial to further developing his perspective:

I felt nervous though. I knew I wanted to go up, but at the same time, I didn't want to go up. But I think I didn't want to go up because the nervousness was like, I don't know, ensnaring me a little I was making my way up there already but I was taking my time. I was walking slow. Then they started pushing me and I was like oh my gosh I got up there and just spilled my heart and mind out. Every time I make speeches like that I tend to think about the people that left me. But not who left me, but had to go home to heaven . . . I don't know, that like spikes my emotions and stuff, you know once you spike your emotions and your heart gets going, your blood starts flowing and everything just comes natural and even though you may feel nervous, it's not really nervousness. It's just that quiver of feelings of does the crowd feel the same things I do? Do they see the same things I see? How will they react to this? All that goes through your head and stuff. It's like once you interact with a large crowd, once you talk with them or give them a speech, or telling them what you think, I think you start critiquing yourself a little bit.

Service was a way of encountering and overcoming the preconceived limitations participants held for themselves. Enabled by the trusting, supportive community of Grandview,

participants were willing to take risks and venture into foreign situations. Participants relied on their close bonds with the service-learning coordinator, teachers, and even their peers to provide the encouragement to overcome their fears and become civically engaged.

Developing into competent individuals. As a result of being challenged, participants developed the abilities to flourish in these new roles. The experience of being pushed out of their comfort zone helped participants develop the skills needed to be a change agent. Participants explained that through service-learning, they “learned a lot about the world and about themselves.” Service opportunities enabled the development of the student into a more competent individual adept at community engagement. These qualities included becoming more knowledgeable, capable, and confident.

The service site was a place where participants developed, applied, and refined their skills. Some sites even provided training on interacting with the public. Participants came away feeling that they were more adept at influencing the people within their community, and they had gained actual experience interacting with the public and generating interest in their work:

I think it helped with my social skills a lot because I'm not really used to talking to strangers and stuff It took me out of my comfort zone the first time I did it. Now it's becoming natural to me, it improved my skills . . .

The training was vital in building the confidence of participants and also ensured their success in engaging community members. Others completed training on fundraising and grant writing. Participants also described the skills they developed by helping to organize events and plan meetings.

Experiencing a variety of roles through service gave participants a sense of having done it all. They felt knowledgeable of community ails and resources and demonstrated their ability to

apply this understanding in real situations. Participants were able to critically dissect problems and exhibited a sense of confidence for engaging in the work of social change even though they realized there were often no straightforward solutions.

Becoming compassionate. While participants were developing into more competent individuals with the skills to engage in community work, they were also engaged in a less obvious process of inner growth. Participants explained that service-learning and the school culture in general made a deep impression on them not only academically but "as a person, as a whole." Service experiences prompted qualitative shifts in participants and they possessed an awareness of how they became more compassionate. Harper poignantly explained that engaging in service showed students "how to die to themselves" in order "to be down for a higher purpose." Service was a way to learn how to "be selfless." Participants listed the character traits they developed: "kindness, sincerity, humbleness, teamwork, humility, and acceptance." Participants explained that their source of motivation was an empathetic view of those who are harmed by injustices. Jackson stated: "That's my biggest thing when it comes to service, is helping others in need." Service was to simply "give back," which was fulfilling in its own right: "Anytime I can help out people it's an achievement."

Through these inner shifts participants began to view service as a way to be in the world, with authentic and meaningful ways of relating and building community. Recognizing their own growth, participants expressed a desire for their peers to also experience these shifts, they surmised: "Imagine how much better the world would be then." By becoming more compassionate, participants' motivation for service came from within their own desire to make a meaningful impact.

Emerging as leaders. Service-learning was an avenue for the participants to emerge as leaders in the school. As seniors, they displayed not only great dedication to the service-learning program within the school, but an inner drive to uplift their community. Their commitments were a way of standing out, being recognized, securing special opportunities, and excelling within the school. Intrinsically motivated, participants embraced advanced roles in the program as they matured as student leaders and advocates for service-learning. In positions of leadership, participants represented Grandview at community events, and they felt valued for their expertise. They also enjoyed being recognized by people and organizations outside of the school as leaders in service-learning.

Within the school, participants were responsible for assisting the development of the service-learning program. Participants were ambassadors of the program, responsible for engaging and recruiting their peers and spreading awareness of service opportunities. They felt a very genuine sense of responsibility for establishing the service-learning program within the school which was driven by their belief that they could make a bigger impact, real change in their city, by supporting the development of their peers into service.

As leaders of freshman fraternity sessions, participants worked to inspire younger students. Participants explained: "They [freshman] look up to you as mentors . . . older brothers." Participants' self-direction was evident in the goals they had for the freshman. They saw freshman's development of personal traits, such as kindness, humility, and selflessness, as essential to their ability to form community both within and outside of the school. Participants voluntarily went a step further by introducing some freshman to their service sites in the community. Participants demonstrated an authentic desire to set their peers up for success; they

felt that leading by example was the best way to do this. They explained: "If they see I can do it, they can do it."

Participants' status as leaders resulted in their attainment of more exclusive opportunities, which continued to facilitate their inner and outer development. Equipped with the knowledge, experience, and compassion for service, participants embraced more leadership roles. In this way, participants' experience of service became a self-sustaining progression (Figure 7). Participants were immersed in a continuous cycle where leadership was a natural extension of self as service became incorporated into their own motivations.

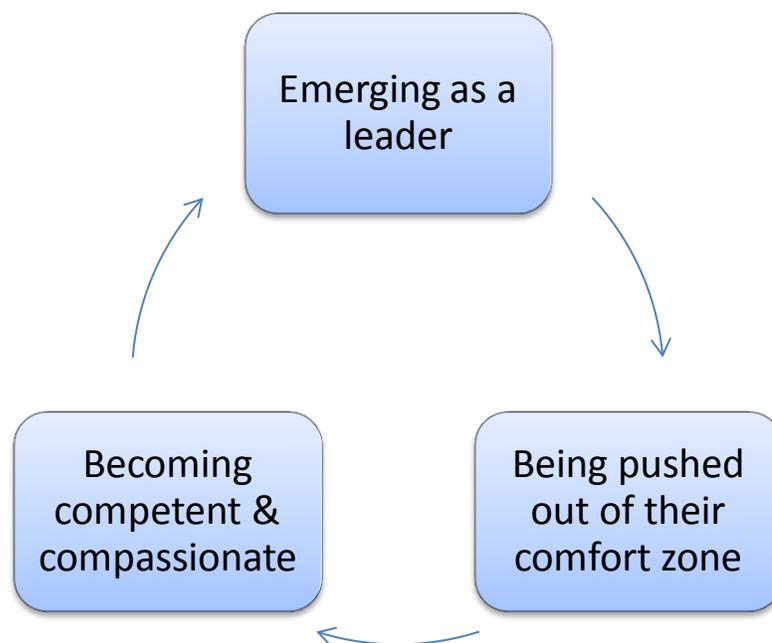


Figure 7. A self-sustaining progression developed through participants' attainment of advanced opportunities and leadership roles, enabling their growth, development, and ultimately a deeper commitment to service.

Summary. Through a progression of empowering practices, participants experienced unexpected development through the service-learning program. Student-teacher relationships communicated value, respect, and trust to participants while providing them with the confidence to step into unfamiliar service roles. As they engaged in meaningful service, participants' exercised voice, developed ownership, and saw the positive changes they made in their neighborhoods. They concluded service "is not about the hours . . . it's about bettering the community." The impacts participants made were personally relevant, they argued: "Even though it might be small, it's still a change." Seeing the effects of their commitments, while being empowered through the practices of the program, permitted a new relationship to service-learning to develop; it was no longer a requirement being imposed upon them. Participants' motivations were directed from a newly emerging sense of self as individuals capable of bringing concrete change to their neighborhoods and the experience of feeling impactful resulted in their desire to make an even greater, lasting change through service.

Participants' development of a self-directed motivation for service represents the completion of a transformation which started with their resistance to the service-learning program. The new roles encountered through service gave participants a place to flourish and grow in both in the inner and outer sense. Participants' development as change agents involved becoming competent, compassionate, civically engaged community members. Participants exhibited confidence in voicing their opinions and engaging in conversations about social change. Service was internalized as they experienced inner shifts that enabled fulfillment through their work. Suddenly, the participants were directing their own engagement in the program and service became a vehicle for expressing their own motivations in the world. Participants' high level of investment in the program prompted their identifying with and

internalizing goals for their work. As they did so, leadership roles in the program were a natural extension of their developing service mentalities.

Expanding Identity

Participants saw their enrollment at Grandview as a life changing event that enabled them to navigate the hostile intellectual space of the streets. As participants' lived experiences intersected with the processes they engaged in through service-learning, they began to re-form interpretations of their lives. This enabled a re-working of participants' constructions of self in light of an emerging view of their communities. What resulted was participants' growth in new expansive directions. In this section participants' realities are explored in light of the ways that service prompted a reflection on oppression and power.

Participants contended that "to see so much and do nothing is pointless." They were adept at using their oppressive experiences to propel them forward, advancing both themselves and their community. The frustration and anger they held for unjust situations was transformed into a source of motivation for engaging in social change work. This remarkable ability positioned participants to succeed, lead, and become pillars of strength capable of affecting change in the community. Participants demonstrated a sense of urgency motivating their actions to work towards change. Participants explained that their anger for injustices "built ambition and wisdom," while statements like "I *have* to do this [change the community]" conveyed their determination.

Being insiders. Participants were insiders in the sense that service often occurred within their communities, placing identities of home and self central within their work. Through these shared identities, participants had an insiders' view of service. This often involved being emotionally entwined in the issues encountered through service. Here, the social issues

encountered, or more accurately re-encountered, through service were familiar and participants explained them as "ordinary stuff." The processes that unraveled as participants engaged and confronted "ordinary" aspects of life enabled a deeper view of themselves and their communities.

Participants possessed first-hand knowledge of the experience of poverty. Shared identity and experience were evident throughout their accounts of service that confronted manifestations of poverty. A participant who volunteered at his community's soup kitchen described recognizing his neighbors' emotions:

So I start passing out food and stuff and I see people from my neighborhood. Sometimes they feel ashamed and I can see it in their eyes, like "I'm going to the soup kitchen and I don't have any food." I'm sitting here like why are they ashamed? I used to eat here too. Participants were also connected to the experiences of the children in their neighborhoods that they mentored. Their own experience of growing up on the same streets without a mentor drove their dedication to these children. A participant who particularly enjoyed relating with children explained how he knew the importance of his work: "Because no one ever told me they was proud of me."

Participants experienced deeply painful feelings as insiders. This was especially apparent when Harper discussed two coinciding tragedies, the Trayvon Martin murder and the death of a teen in their city, as he described, "due to police brutality." The identities of these young men collided with Harper's during the city's Hoodies in the Hood March to protest the killing of Martin. The march was an unexpected experience in being a face and a voice for Martin, as well as the other teen, leaving Harper "feeling all types of crazy that day."

While marching Harper exclaimed: "Hoodies, skittles, ice tea, that doesn't mean you can murder me!" and the crowd echoed his chant. The event organizer called for "a young Black man" to come up and address the crowd. Harper continued:

So as soon as she said she needs a young Black male, I'm one of the darker people there, so, everybody just looked at me All eyes shot at me, and my heart, I don't know, it just pulsed, it felt like it ripped apart and then came back together!

Harper shared how he was pushed up through the crowd to speak. It was there that his emotions spiked, he detailed: "I got up there and spilled my heart and mind out." Harper's experience was a way of feeling united with his community as they were inside the same emotions of the march.

Sadly, Quinn also lost a friend, a victim of a shooting; ironically it occurred immediately after he completed a service-learning project to combat street violence. He reflected: "My last day of the program, that same night, somebody I know got killed I just spent a whole 40 hours making this program against violence." Clearly, participants' experience of service-learning was not as detached observers, but as vulnerable insiders. Service-learning was not about problems distant out in the world, it was about real life. As Quinn clarified, homicide was something that touched his life "multiple times, it's like the third time that somebody I know got killed."

Participants' lived experience with poverty, violence, and crime became a source of motivation for deep investment in the work of social change. To participants service was a "gift back to my community." On a deeper level, as injustices coincided with their identities, service brought the participants in closer to self and allowed for a re-examining of their own norms. Harper reflected: "What you think of your community is what you think of yourself. Because

first you have to be a product of your environment and [then you can] make your environment be a product of you.”

Reaching into their world. Service-learning also positioned participants to consider the effects of poverty on others. The service-learning trip to the Dominican Republic enabled participants to build a greater awareness of oppression as they encountered the effects of the country’s educational disparities on the children they worked with. Harper described how his perception of the country shifted by “reaching into their world:”

I think during the first few days of the trip we were on the beach relaxing and stuff
But when we met the kids and I knew why we were there, my whole perspective changed
. . . how do they look at their country? So, how do I look at their country? Like it's
beautiful here, everyone's happy. Oh, ya, it's paradise. And then, like, reaching into their
world and seeing how they have to go through things. It's like wow It's like they
were living in paradise, but everything wasn't paradise.

As participants considered the experience of poor Dominican children, an inner reflection and deeper reading of their own world heightened their sense of injustice in their home communities.

As foreigners, participants had a clearer view of the ways structural inequalities limited children's access to education. Upon entering the school which "looked like an old abandoned building" Jackson remarked: "They really have to learn in here?" Seeing the dilapidated and overcrowded school in an unfamiliar environment prompted participants’ reflection on the oppressive structures which resulted in inadequate resources for education. Participants critiqued: "It doesn't give everyone a chance to learn, so it just isolates everyone from having the same opportunities." Participants were also surprised to encounter a "self-hating race" in the Dominican Republic where lighter colored skin and hair were equated with higher social status.

Reaching into their world, that is considering the injustices which framed the lives of Dominican children, spurred a more conscious reaching into participants' own world. Considering the difficulties Dominican children faced in breaking the cycle of the status quo prompted an inner reflection on their own experience. As they engaged in a critical reflection, participants own experiences with oppression and the tacit, unjust arrangements of power in their home communities became more apparent. Based on his observations in the Dominican Republic, Harper especially sharpened his awareness of the dynamics of race and power evident within ways of being in his own culture. He began to critique the ways Black culture in America also attempts to soften their race, "like they think of themselves as inferior to a certain race."

Rising up as pillars. Harper shared his vision of himself as a "pillar," the "strength" of the community. In his words, pillars are "positive role models who try to uplift their community in some kind of positive way," as they exhibit the strength to withstand "everybody . . . bombarding them, like "You can't do this, you can't do this, you're just like them, you're just like them." In their own way, each participant asked himself: "How can I be a real pillar?" Participants saw themselves as pillars as they engaged in community work as self-directed change agents. As they rose up as positive forces in their neighborhoods, participants felt that they had broken free from the status quo. This was a powerful state where participants believed they were not only changing the direction of their lives, but creating a path for their peers as well: "If I can be a chain that pops in the cycle, maybe I can influence some others to be something positive."

Pillars are capable of transforming their environment according to Harper. In this way, the ghetto is "no longer a swamp, it's a palace." Mentoring was a way participants' shaped their neighborhoods. They embraced their roles as mentors when they were needed most, even at

moments when no one was looking and it did not count toward their service hours. Quinn noticed a younger student slipping through the cracks who was in danger of being expelled from the school. He saw that he could make an impact on this student and took action, Quinn explained: "I keep him with me I made it my personal business to take care of him." Harper, aware that the children in his neighborhood needed encouragement, especially from a male, also recognized a need and stepped in:

I can tell they learn and grow off of it because they go down there "Oh, look at what grade I got. I got a 85." You have no other choice but to be proud of them. And I notice like, kids where I'm from, they don't have father figures, and it's not like I'm trying to be a father figure, I'm just trying to be a figure in their lives that they can like look to. Like "Oh, he really did help." Because, like you have to believe in the kids, so I tell them I'm proud of them, because no one ever told me they was proud of me.

As pillars, participants were self-directed and embraced their potential as change agents. They were clear about their purpose: "I know I need to change the people in my community and in the world, the world community." Out in their neighborhoods, away from Grandview, participants were civically engaged, socially aware, and critically reflected on the status quo and their abilities to break through it. As change agents, their actions were informed by a service mentality. Jackson modestly maintained: "If you see a problem in [the city], then you see that there needs to be a change." Being a pillar was sometimes just as simple:

Now I walk around town and ask people if they need help. And they just look at me like I'm crazy. It's like, being from the inner city, young Black boys, they don't expect them to say do you need help? Like where I'm from, so they just look at me like I'm nutty. They probably think "Oh, he's gonna rob me," stuff like that, they probably have

preconceived notions and stuff. But now they don't because everybody in my neighborhood knows I like to help people. A lot of people come up to me for tutoring. Like I have a lot of kids, we run our own tutoring program here, but I also have a lot of kids in my neighborhood like "Oh can you help me? I don't know how to do algebra. School is dumb, I'm gonna go smoke." No you're not, come here, let me help you with your algebra, this is how you do it. . .

Participants' sense of pride in being recognized as someone to go to for help was obvious. They truly felt like pillars as neighborhood youth approached them on the streets for help. Being recognized in their developing service-informed identities was self-affirming; participants not only saw themselves as different, but they also realized they had changed the way their community perceives them.

Summary. Participants engaged in a process of constructing a new identity as a self-directed change agent, or as a student described a pillar. Expanding identity was the result of participants' development of new interpretations of social ills, while at the same time realizing their power over the issues that framed their lives. As they did so, participants' identity merged with the goals of service-learning so that community action became a natural extension of the self. Service-learning was also a vehicle for deepening the connection between self and community. The ultimate impact for participants was that the problems of the streets, were not only navigated, but intellectually overcome through newly developing interpretations. As they made strides in their home communities, participants' experience of feeling impactful spiraled upwards, bringing a new sense of power and hope.

The Dangers of Sinking

Participants detailed how even as pillars in the community they continued to face the dangers of “sinking” by falling into norms and stereotypes. Recall Harper’s depiction: “You can be a positive pillar in the ghetto, but it's like a swamp or bog. You'll just end up sinking, you might as well just give up.” The development of new identities was hazardous work that required mental and emotional steadiness and strength. Being the “chain that pops in a cycle” required intense engagement with fears and perceived limitations as well as the overwhelming complexity of social problems. Additionally, the neighborhood environment was not nurturing to participants’ emerging sense of self as change agents. The obstacles participants encountered in maintaining a newly emerging change agent identity were a constant challenge. Conflicting messages and mindsets, products of the oppressive status quo, had to be navigated.

Battling stereotypes. Participants’ experience of service-learning even with its empowering practices still occurred within the oppressive status quo of stereotypes dominant in the city. Being stereotyped was a way they were delegitimized as powerful individuals with the capacity to uplift their community, which re-ignited an inner dialogue of defeat. It seemed that as participants encountered this type of oppression, they engaged in an internal struggle against stereotypes. Participants concluded: “I'm not just battling the world, I'm battling stereotypes.”

Battling stereotypes was a way of challenging the status quo:

I don't want them to group anybody anymore. I think I'm going to break the stereotype of people being grouped into stereotypes. Because I believe if you break that, they won't know what to do. They'll be like, “Oh, well we can't make any money off of saying, oh these people, oh these people.” Because once they look past the skin, and the ethnicity, and the culture and all this stuff, and look at everyone as humans, the world will be

enlightened that there is no such thing as a stereotype. People make mistakes. People do good things. People are successful in their own little ways, even if they're like not more successful than you. You might be successful in your own way. You might be successful in this way. I believe a stereotype is like a box, holding everybody in their own little groups and The sooner we break the box . . . the intersections of where people are located. I think we can break all stereotypes I'm not going to stop until I die.

Being lumped together as “young Black boys” and the negative connotations that carried was hurtful. Participants, even in light of their expanding identities, experienced moments where they felt: “I'm probably going to be looked at as a nuisance, like a criminal anyway.” Service was a vehicle for confronting these stereotypes, as participants’ “good work” went unacknowledged:

But they [youth] all see the effects that one crime in [the city] can do to every other teen in [the city]. Like they put us all in a bracket, that's how we feel. And we all get recognized the same way. Instead of saying these kids, instead of saying this person or this person who's a teenager . . . they say these teenagers of [the city]. And they feel as though they are getting clumped into a group, even though they're doing all this hard work and all this good work. They sit here, like, “Well I'm just gonna be a statistic anyway, I don't care. No matter how much good I do, I won't get recognition, I won't get recognition for being a good person.”

Going unnoticed was just as harmful as being stereotyped, a participant offered: “No one sees how I'm affecting my community and trying to make a change.” Participants expressed a powerful desire to be seen as different, as individuals, as good and worthy. They also deeply

hoped the school and students would be recognized for their contributions to the city.

Participants' desire is evident to the hurt and marginalization they experienced through oppressive structures of day to day stereotyping.

Feeling lost in the world. As participants navigated a new, service-oriented path, they described feeling overwhelmed by the suffering they witnessed on the streets. The service-learning curriculum gave them a greater awareness of local and global issues, and the weight of these problems was sometimes palpable. As participants identified social problems not as the result of individual deficiencies, but as manifestations of unjust systems, they became increasingly lost in the enormity of the issues. Their widened awareness compounded the day to day realities they observed as they encountered complex social problems where there were no easy answers.

Reflecting on societal distributions of power and its oppressive manifestations in the non-dominant culture in light of local problems contributed to a building sense of frustration. A participant offered: "There's just no more justice in America." Participants saw their neighborhoods "boiling" with injustice:

They [Grandview students] feel lost in the world probably. Because they see people dying When I say people I mean teenagers our age or like a couple of years older than us. Ya, it's like really boiling down there. Not good down there. Not safe to go outside, I don't think so. I stay in.

The experience of feeling "lost in the world," as the participant described, occurred as their status as insiders within local injustices collided with their deepening sense of power, race, and oppression.

Feeling alone in service. As leaders, participants embodied a different intellectual space than their peers. Dealing with the resistance of their classmates to engage in the program gave participants a sense of being alone in service, making their new identity a frustrating and lonely place to be at times. Their efforts to help others see the potential of service for themselves and their community most often went unrequited. Participants described how their peers wanted to “blow past” the service-learning requirement and did not understand the “goodness that it brings to themselves.” At the same time peers outside of school assumed that service was a punishment for a crime.

Therefore, participants often could not relate to their peers or share their goals and aspirations for creating change. Participants felt that other youth were unaware of the work being done right in their neighborhoods, stating they “probably don't realize what we are doing . . . they probably don't see all the changes going on in their community.” Harper described how community leaders face the challenge of being a change agent amidst an unengaged citizenry:

. . . they're so sad that the people from where they're from . . . they don't see how much power they have, they're like not informed, they're not educated enough to see this. So they're constantly not only finding a way to better themselves, but to better the people of the community. But at the same time, it depresses them, because the people don't even want it [change] for themselves. Some people see it, but they're afraid to take it

How do I make them want this? And then, in a sense, people get more depressed . . . so they fall victim within themselves.

Harper's depiction highlights the emotional investment of community leaders and the danger of becoming depleted by their commitments. The other participants too faced these risks as they devoted themselves to causes which their peers had little value for.

Wanting to become unified towards change. Participants espoused a strong desire to create a service movement, they questioned: "If you're not doing anything, why not help other people, especially in your own community?" Feeling alone in service along with an awareness of the oppressive manifestations of power led participants to feel as if their work was futile. Any impact they could affect felt small in comparison to the realities and complexities they observed day after day. Participants concluded that they could not do it all by themselves and saw their ability to create real change as tied to the desire of their peers to also take action; they admitted: "It's going to take more than me."

Participants' intention to band together was also motivated by the difficulty they perceived in reclaiming societal power. A sense of injustice over the murder of Trayvon Martin especially fueled their thinking, a participant remarked: "One person can't make a difference until other people that are being targeted make a difference." Out of this realization came participants' aspirations to create a civically engaged public where those experiencing oppression unite as activists for one another. Participants believed that only then will violence end, and until then by limiting themselves by not being unified, their unengaged peers are limiting what is possible in the community. Here, peer pressure played a role, they explained: "There's not enough people doing positive things for everybody to follow."

Participants saw service-learning as a way to construct compassionate community with "everybody taking care of each other." This was not only about Grandview, but extended to a hope to see service-learning in every high school in the city's district. Participants felt that "The more people that join in, the more people that will be inspired" and this positive shift would enable a sense of power over the problems they see every day.

Summary. As participants constructed a service-informed identity they risked sinking under the weight of their heightened awareness of oppressive and unjust systems. Maintaining newly emerging visions of themselves as impactful change agents involved navigating complications, that participants explained “saddens them” as their “drive goes away for a little bit.” Interactions outside of the school challenged participants’ constructions of self and the change they believed they were capable of affecting. In their neighborhoods, participants felt isolated by being around people who “don’t see how much power they have” in changing their community. These interactions drew students into a mental engagement with stereotypes and the status quo, and possibly what they thought of themselves. While participants had a firm sense of impact, they were also reminded that their impacts were small in the grand scheme of social change. These were intellectual battles against feeling as though they were destined to succumb to the statistics. At the same time participants were hopeful that service offered a way to construct community throughout the city, as they felt injustices could be overcome through unity.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the data that was collected to provide greater insight to participants’ experiences of empowerment and self-authorship. This included a description of the research setting, service-learning curriculum, and research participants, as well as a cross case analysis of interview, observation, and document data. Six processes that participants engaged in were detailed: “Navigating Oppressive Frameworks,” “Resistance,” “Forming Community,” “The Empowering Practices of Service,” “Expanding Identity,” and “The Dangers of Sinking.”

Data analysis revealed how service-learning offered participants an approach for claiming power over the social problems which framed their lives as an inner dialogue of *I can do something, I can affect change* developed. Service-learning became a way to change the world by affecting real, impactful change, not in the future, but right there in that very moment. Within the school, community and student-teacher relationships were instrumental to participants' experience. As self-directed change agents, participants employed the service-learning program to express their personal motivations for social change based upon their first-hand experiences in an unjust system.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

This case study explored how service-learning may enable a social structure for empowerment. Service-learning aims to empower both students and communities to inspire for social justice and change (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Critical theorists describe empowerment as the creation of new spaces for knowledge production and identity formation (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). By exploring the dynamics of service-learning through a lens of critical theory, the research considered how service-learning may enable self-direction and the development of a critical consciousness for marginalized high school students. The experiences of three marginalized, male students at an urban charter high school were investigated to unravel the intricacies of empowerment processes. The study aimed to contribute to the understanding of pedagogical methods for remedying educational inequalities that may empower culturally non-dominant, marginalized students. To explore empowerment and self-authorship, the participants were approached “as living texts to be deciphered” (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 20).

While a majority of studies have considered the experiences of middle class high school and college learners, this research focused on how service-learning may improve instruction for marginalized, low-income high school students. The study addressed the lack of knowledge on how such experiences may support marginalized students’ development as learners, as engaged citizens, and as community members. Gaining an understanding of these processes is important due to an increasing trend of unequal access to quality education that disproportionately affects minority students, including rising high school dropout rates. The research also explored the possibilities for engaging diverse learners whose life experiences and cultural forms of knowledge have been delegitimized by schooling.

This chapter elaborates on the findings by reexamining students' experiences in light of critical theory. The literature on both service-learning and critical theory informs a consideration of the study's major findings. Of special concern is students' potential for empowerment. Final reflections on the research experience and implications for action in service-learning pedagogy are offered as well as recommendations for further research.

Major Findings

This section investigates the intellectual and social spaces participants constructed through service-learning. These spaces have the potential to position students to encounter social injustices in new ways that facilitate students' re-authoring of self and community identities. In the following discussion, each of the six major findings are reviewed with attention to the potential of these spaces to re-direct power over learning experiences, both within and outside of the school. Participants' development as change agents is illustrated through the interactions that occurred as both lived experience and service-learning positioned them in the midst of complex social situations and power relations.

Navigating oppressive frameworks. McLaren (1989) contends that it is essential to understand "the cultural and social forms through which students learn to define themselves" (p. 226). He continues: "To ignore the ideological dimensions of student experience is to deny the ground upon which students learn, speak, and imagine" (p. 227). In this study, it was apparent that participants' daily realities defined their interpretations of self prior to engaging in the service-learning curriculum. Participants' world views and identities were informed by their day to day experiences within oppressive frameworks that manifested social ills such as poverty and violence. Lived experience was an exercise in navigating unequal power arrangements. These experiences "of everyday life produce in turn the different voices students employ to give

meaning to their worlds and, consequently, to their existence in the larger society” (McLaren, 1989, p. 227). For participants in this study, everyday life certainly informed a dialogue.

Participants’ internal dialogue was a construction of day to day oppressive interactions and their depictions of neighborhood life were infused with hegemonic views of self and society. Problems of the streets—crime, violence, drugs, poverty, and low educational attainment—were perceived as the product of individual choices and deficiencies. These voices also informed participants’ bleak visions of their own futures. As participants first entered the school, academic success, and especially graduation, seemed improbable. While these inner dialogues initially went unacknowledged, McLaren (1989) posits that confronting the voices inherited through oppressive arrangements is an essential function of an empowering education. The experience of navigating oppression, along with participants’ unconscious interpretations, informed their actions in the school, namely resistance.

A critical education involves confronting the voices that inform world views and using lived experiences as the drive for learning (McLaren, 1989). In this study, participants’ lived experience was the drive towards not only learning, but social change as well. The service-learning curriculum, and the school culture in general, were rich with opportunities for storytelling and critique of the social situations which allowed participants to analyze injustices.

Resistance. Critical theorists such as Fine, McLaren, and Kincheloe discuss student resistance. They contend that as schooling delegitimizes lived experience, students engage in a process of resistance to school culture (Fine, 1991; McLaren, 1989). McLaren (1989) argues that resistance in schools is an effort of the students to bring their culture to the classroom, since the culture of the classroom is infused with a cultural capital to which they have little access. Kincheloe (2008) points to the dynamics of culture, race, and power infusing students’

resistance. He explains that students do what they have “to do to survive in white-dominated institutions” (p. 25). Through their experience of schooling, students may come to realize that success in school may require a rejection of their ethnicities and cultural ways of knowing (Kincheloe, 2008). Conversely, resistance provides an avenue for legitimizing culture and race (Kincheloe, 2008).

In this study, resistance, acting out in anger or silence, represented the tenacity of participants to retain their street identities and cultural ways. Resistance extended to every element of Grandview: the teachers, the service-learning program, and even their peers. Participants were suspicious of teachers’ attempts to establish trusting connections and resistance was an effective means for undermining their efforts. The conflict of being positioned between two colliding ways of being, school and street, brought participants to the point of feeling as though leaving Grandview was a viable option.

It seems that interactions in the school that first trying year were a problematic conglomeration where lived experience collided with the new directions advocated by the school. On one level, participants’ lived experience was delegitimized as street culture collided with more professional, that is culturally White, ways of dressing, speaking, and interacting in the school. More deeply, the root of resistance was located within the confrontation between participants’ limited, hegemonic view of self and the school’s dialogue of achievement and possibility. If the overriding message of the school was that they could, and would achieve, then resistance was the way that this call was rejected and street-informed dialogues of defeat maintained.

Additionally, as students entered the school, they brought with them a well-formed cynicism of schooling. Fine (1991) discusses a warranted distrust of anything public: “In low-

income communities, that which is public is typically regarded as untrustworthy. The very fact of being public renders it suspect, like the cop on the beat, the welfare lady, or the teacher who offers “special help” (p. 197-198). Although Grandview as a charter school was distinct from the public high school, a general distrust of schooling established through encountering tacit dimensions of culture, race, and power permeated students’ resistance.

Forming community. Educators can “construct classrooms of silencing or community” (Fine, 1991, p. 59). Aims for community were boldly communicated as participants, who were accustomed to being silenced through previous schooling experiences, were roused by their principal’s words of social critique during Grandview’s orientation. Fine describes critique as the opposite of silencing, a “pedagogical and curricular muting of students’ voices” (p. 35). Through critique, social problems are not glossed over, but courageously explored and given voice. In his welcoming speech, Grandview’s principal demonstrated that educational inequities would not be ignored; it was clear that a confrontation with social injustices were central to the school’s motives. The principal also displayed his conviction for students’ abilities as powerful individuals capable of not only academic success, but community leadership toward social change as well. The principal’s commitments challenged students’ street-informed inner dialogue that was maintained through resistance, opening the gates to community.

School climate and relationships are of extreme importance to marginalized students (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). Freire (2005) encourages teachers to relate to their students with “lovingness” (p. 74) and such student-teacher relationships were powerfully positioned at the core of the Grandview community. Participants detailed their emotional ties with their teachers which enabled intellectual safety and transformative work. Fine (1991) describes how teachers can invite “conversation about life problems” as one act of community.

Participants in this study also experienced great trust in their teachers as they expressed interest and concern for their personal challenges. Teachers addressed participants' uncertainties and assured them that they would not let anyone fail.

Grandview became a safe environment, inspired by the lovingness of teachers, the message of social critique, and through the support of peers. Importantly, community provided an avenue for valuing student knowledge. Fine (1991) describes the community driven classrooms she encountered where "Expertise, understanding, critique, and knowing were shared, negotiated, and considered the stuff of education" (p. 59). In this study, analysis of community life—experiences of racism and other injustices—were welcomed in school discourse. As teachers invite students' lives into classroom discourse, they interrupt the institutional silencing of schooling (Fine, 1991). In this sense, dialogue is not just a way of knowing, but is a way to change the world by building communities that enable justice and human flourishing (Freire, 2009).

At Grandview, community had transformational potential. Student resistance was effortlessly deconstructed as their voices, understandings, and experiences were embraced so that the curriculum was not merely presented, but co-created with students. To this Freire (2005) attends: "It is through hearing the learners, a task unacceptable to authoritarian educators, that democratic teachers increasingly prepare themselves to be heard by learners" (p. 115). Out of the unity with teachers and peers, in an environment committed to critique of the status quo, participants' inner dialogue began to transform. The result was a more conscious awareness of self and therefore the potential to re-write the self.

Empowering practices of service. The construction of new spaces, relationships, and identities is central to an empowerment driven approach to schooling (Giroux, 2005). Service-

learning was empowering through participants' relationships with teachers, engagement in meaningful service, and holistic development as change agents. As an extension of community, student-teacher relationships were a powerful catalyst that demonstrated value, respect, and trust to participants. The relationships, based in mutual respect, established a Freirian vision of reciprocity in the service-learning program. Participants experienced service as meaningful and personally relevant as they engaged in higher level responsibilities, developed an understanding of the purpose and goals of service, exercised their voice, acquired a sense of ownership for their work, and felt impactful by making real change in their communities. Participants developed into competent, compassionate change agents as they experienced high quality service experiences that brought them into new and challenging roles.

Participants' experiences of service-learning challenged the banking model of schooling critiqued by Freire (2005/2009). Participants stepped into the role of knowledge producers, where lived experience and cultural knowledge were valued, shifting the dynamics of learning space and power. Service experiences placed participants within the world and its social complexities, so that they were not merely observers of community ails, but knowledgeable and impactful change agents. This widening intellectual space permitted participants' development of their own evolving interpretations and informed actions upon the world. In this sense, they engaged in a critical intervention with the status quo as advocated by Freire (2009). As Giroux (2005) maintains, this provided participants with empowering opportunities for challenging and transforming social and political inequalities.

As an evolving pedagogy, there has been much attention on the development of rigorous frameworks for service-learning to optimize student outcomes (e.g., Billig & Weah, 2008). Interestingly, participants' experiences, as elements of an empowering education, identified in

the present study echo the guidelines for high quality service-learning presented in the literature. There is general consensus that high quality service-learning programs, those who demonstrate the greatest benefit for students, provide real and challenging responsibilities, opportunities for decision making and developing ideas, and result in making an authentic contribution (Billig & Weah, 2008; Furco, 2001; Melchior & Bailis, 2001). It has also been established that students should develop an understanding of their service experiences within the context of the societal issues being addressed while having a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults in an environment that supports open expression of ideas (Billig & Weah, 2008). In the present study, such components were also pivotal to participants' experience.

McLaren and Giarelli (1995) contend that a critical social imagination develops as students traverse diverse contexts. This was clear in participants' accounts of service-learning experiences that pushed them out of their comfort zone and into new and challenging roles. Such experiences also advanced participants' development, positioning them to emerge as leaders in the school. Similarly, Furco (2001) also detailed how high quality service opportunities resulted in students' greater interest in school, community, and positions of leadership. Despite these congruencies, one difference did emerge. The service-learning literature largely describes enhanced student-teacher relationships and school culture as an outcome of service-learning (e.g., Furco, 2001). In this instance, however, community enabled participants to move beyond their resistance and engage in service; that is relationships were not an outcome, but a catalyst.

What appears unique is that in the present study, leadership roles in the service-learning program were a natural extension of participants' investment in the program prompted by their identifying with the goals of their work. To this, Freire (2009) offers:

Students, as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge. Because they apprehend the challenge as interrelated to other problems within a total context, not as a theoretical question, the resulting comprehension tends to be increasingly critical and thus constantly less alienated. Their response to the challenge evokes new challenges, followed by new understandings, and gradually the students come to regard themselves as committed. (p. 81)

In this way, service-learning became a self-sustaining venture for the participants as it transcended its status as a graduation requirement and was advanced as an authentic, student-directed channel for social change. Participants became "committed" possibly by internalizing service as they experienced inner shifts that enabled fulfillment through their work.

Expanding identity. While attention has mostly been given to service-learning as an avenue through which students encounter their own privilege (e.g., Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Henry, 2005), this study was concerned with students' constructions of self as they grappled with their own oppression. As insiders to the injustices of poverty, violence, and crime, service-learning was about re-encountering familiar social problems—the reality of participants' lives—along with their un-critiqued interpretations. In other situations, participants were positioned as outsiders. Interestingly, reaching into the world of others also prompted an inner reflection and a deeper reading of participants' own world, which heightened their sense of

injustice in their home communities. Across these contexts, service-learning was a vehicle for deepening the connection, through critical thought and action, between self and community.

Service-learning enabled the construction of a new social/intellectual space that permitted participants' developing interpretations. In this space, participants' readings of their social world advanced a re-writing of their identities as learners and community members. Giroux (2005), through his concept of borderlands, details how students can explore and critique the ways power inscribes social situations in these intellectual spaces. In the borderlands, students are positioned to create new knowledge and identify the structures that oppress and thereby "rewrite their own histories, identities, and learning possibilities" (Giroux, 2005, p. 22).

Service-learning offered a means of challenging and disrupting interpretations of reality, infused with race and power, facilitating participants' construction of a deep and empowering view of self and community. As race and power were acknowledged and legitimized through a critique of structural injustice, service-learning brought the participants closer towards an empowered self and away from hegemonic, unconscious interpretations. Participants' self-written vision of themselves were as pillars charged with aims towards self and community uplift. As the pillars of their neighborhoods, independent from the supportive Grandview community and the service-learning program, participants were civically engaged, socially aware, and critically reflected on the status quo and their abilities to transform it.

McLaren and Giarelli (1995) contend that to reclaim power and identity, students need the opportunity to re-write the relationships between self and society while cultivating a political imagination. The driving impact of service-learning for participants was that the problems of the streets were not only navigated, but intellectually overcome through newly developing interpretations. Participants' views of their social worlds and constructions of the self were

interdependent. Expanding identity occurred as participants developed new social interpretations, while at the same time realizing their power over the issues that framed their lives.

The dangers of sinking. Identity development was an on-going process that required an intense mental engagement with the oppressive status quo informing day to day interactions as well as the overwhelming complexity of social problems, all while feeling alone and isolated. Daily exchanges positioned participants in the midst of intellectually hostile neighborhood environments that delegitimized their stance as effective young men with the capacity to uplift their community. Participants described this as an intellectual battle where their resolve to rise up as pillars was their only defense. Participants' depictions of the risks of sinking, succumbing to the oppressive status quo and internalizing it as their own voice, demonstrate the resiliency required to maintain newly emerging visions of self and society.

Identity development involved a negotiation of delegitimizing and self-confirming experiences that tested participants' constructions of self. Participants' experience highlights the difficulties of transformative work, which involved not only moments of fulfillment and hope, but also times of loneliness, confusion, and sadness. While participants shifted towards an empowering reading of self, their accounts suggest that identity construction also requires a struggle with oppressive interpretations of self and other. This dichotomy provided participants a place to test out and struggle to maintain their self-directed, critically engaged visions of self.

Final Reflections

This study detailed how a school-community and its service-learning curriculum enabled a transformational journey within a city that struggles with educational disparities and other manifestations of failing social arrangements. Participants in the research entered the school

with internal dialogues that were unconsciously informed by oppressive constructions of reality. Service-learning positioned students to confront and deconstruct the voices they used to make sense of their worlds through community-enabled critique where social problems were explored and given voice. As their realities were acknowledged, a more conscious awareness of the constructions of self emerged, preparing fertile ground for the re-writing of self. Meaningful service-learning experiences widened this intellectual space as students' informed actions co-created a curriculum for social change. Identities were re-written and contested in the interactive contexts between self, school, and society. Participants' stories demonstrate the power of legitimizing lived experienced and cultural knowledge, and the potential of schooling as place of social critique and empowerment.

The study was concerned with marginalized students who may “find it impossible to define their identities through the cultural and political codes that characterize the dominant culture” (Giroux, 2005, p. 24). The intent of the research was to identify approaches for empowerment for students who are harmed, excluded, and silenced through hidden educational frameworks—that is to change the state of schooling, as Freire (2009) asserts:

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not “marginal,” are not people living “outside” society. They have always been “inside”—inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves.” (p. 74)

Informed by the work of Freire and other critical theorists, the study was approached with a commitment to transforming the structures of oppression that enable educational inequalities and wide disparities among the achievement of White and minority students.

The theoretical framework of critical theory also demonstrated my commitment to social justice which addressed participants' concerns and enabled supportive relationships between the participants and I to develop. Given my status as an outsider in the school and city, this approach was especially valuable in conveying my intentions to engage in a collaborative exploration with participants. Critical theory addressed the dimensions of race/class/power that are often inherent between the 'researched' and 'researcher' by providing an avenue to express my commitments and take a stand on the issues along with the participants. As a result, trust was established which enabled access to rich data as the participants and I embarked on a voyage of discovery together.

The achievement gap is more accurately portrayed as an "opportunity gap" (p. 13) by Fine, Bloom, and Chajet (2010). Their participatory action research mobilized marginalized youth to assess the policies and practices of education from within school walls. Their findings offer a depiction of the rejection marginalized students endure:

In the early part of the twenty-first century, social policies of financial inequity transform engaged and enthused students into young women and men who believe that the nation, adults, and the public sphere have abandoned and betrayed them, in the denial of quality education, democracy, and the promise of equality. They know that race, class, and ethnicity determine who receives, and who is denied, a rich public education. And they resent the silence they confront when they challenge these inequities. (p. 17)

For students, the meaning of inadequate schools was quite clear—society, government, and those in power consider them worthless. Fine, Bloom, and Chajet (2010) went on to document that school experiences that delegitimized student voices quelled their belief in their ability to affect

social/political change, as school-based alienation carried over to a resentful disengagement from civic life.

On the other hand, as demonstrated at Grandview, schools that engage marginalized students as knowledgeable, capable, agents of change in the complicated and challenging contexts of real life (i.e., their neighborhoods) also make a powerful statement. Grandview's resounding message was that students mattered, not only in the school, but in the larger public sphere as well. Service-learning was a way of exercising power that became empowering when it permitted the marginalized student a means of critiquing and transforming oppressive structures while recognizing the ways their own narratives maintained harmful arrangements of power. Participants' experience became action upon the world, as depicted by Freire (2005): "The world gradually stopped being merely a solid support on which we stood; instead, it gradually became the world with which we are in a relationship, and finally, simply moving in the world became practice in the world" (p. 136).

Implications for Service-Learning Practice

Participants' experience offers insight to the pedagogy of service-learning that can be applied to advance the field. The meaningful and empowering components of service-learning documented here offer a basic framework for encountering transformational moments between self, society, and other. Clearly, service-learning should engage students in high quality, challenging, and personally relevant opportunities where they can impact their community. In addition to existing service-learning guidelines, I advocate for the intentional incorporation of critical pedagogy to strengthen service-learning as an empowering practice for marginalized students. The starting point of this vision of service-learning is within the experiences and voices of students. Service-learning, as a critical pedagogy, must "confirm and legitimate the

knowledges and experiences through which students give meaning to their everyday lives” (McLaren, 1989, p. 235), since the greatest potential for empowerment may involve confronting and rewriting their world views. Cipolle (2010) explains: “For service-learning to be critical, students and teachers need to examine issues of power, privilege, and oppression; question the hidden bias and assumptions of race, class, and gender; and work to change the social and economic system for equity and justice” (p. 5).

The study captured the ideologies of participants’ everyday lives. As any pedagogy, service-learning may be used to empower or oppress, to critique or silence, to legitimize or exclude. Clearly, at this time of unprecedented inequality, service-learning must aim for self and community empowerment. In an effort to advance the field I share the ideological problems that unraveled in the research as cautionary tales that point to the need for a more explicit acknowledgement of school and student-based (mis)constructions of power. Then, in an effort to criticalize service-learning, recommendations for relationships, critical talk, and equal access are presented.

Ideological dilemmas. While a growing number of school districts across the country are implementing service-learning and other community engagement programs, relatively few espouse serious aims for social change or are concerned with how their approaches serve students’ empowerment. Many are termed community service programs. In this study, such terminology was an affront to the cultural paradigms and lived experience of participants who interpreted “community service” as a racially-charged punishment. Such ideological divisions demonstrate the need for educators who place themselves within students’ worlds so that they can begin to comprehend the dynamics of race and power embedded in their seemingly neutral, well-intended efforts.

In other conversations, participants' deficiency views of self became apparent as they described service-learning as a way to remedy their perceived cultural shortcomings by helping them develop the abilities (i.e., cultural capital) to gain entrance into mainstream society. Participants felt this was about the ways they talked, dressed, and carried themselves. In light of participants' perceptions of separation from society, that is feeling less than, I find Freire's (2005) discussion of language particularly worthy of consideration:

. . . in the area of language, in which the syntax, orthography, semantics, and accent of the kind spoken by lower-class children are almost always denigrated . . . the problems of language always involve ideological questions and, along with them, questions of power. For example, if there is an "educated norm," it is because there is another style considered uneducated. Who identified the uneducated one as such? (p.132)

While language must be taught as "a fundamental tool for the fight they must wage against injustice and discrimination targeted at them," Freire (2005) contends that students must understand that their language is "as rich and beautiful as the educated norm" (p. 132). Service-learning, or any pedagogy for that matter, must never be used to extoll power over students by projecting an aims of fixing perceived cultural shortcomings. Even though such an aim was not explicitly promoted by Grandview, participants adopted it as one of their own perhaps through their lived experience. Participants were aware that they did not possess the cultural capital necessary to gain entrance into certain situations. Such unacknowledged views of self provide fertile ground for critical conversations that examine, name, and re-write social interpretations.

The final cautionary tale concerns the rigors of empowerment, which involves not only the deconstruction of the voices that define the self, but the subjecting of newly emerging visions

to the negativities of everyday life. As demonstrated by participants, empowerment is a serious undertaking requiring many challenges to what is constructed as real. Participants experienced powerful emotions as their sense of injustice was heightened. Those of privileged backgrounds must understand the difficulties of re-writing self and shifting one's world view. We must also be aware of the ideological rifts between empowering and critical school environments and the dialogue students must navigate on the streets, at home, and with peers. As for the participants in this study, such work was accompanied by inherent risks that rose out of the differences between an inner dialogue of hope and change with the oppressive status quo. Educators must be sensitive to such tensions. Given the conflicts that arise out of unacknowledged ideologies—views of self, society, and other—an aim should be to intentionally incorporate these hidden perspectives into schooling. This would require unified school-communities and student-teacher relationships that permit a shared intellectual space where teachers can learn the worlds of the student and reflective classroom discourse will provide a supportive context for unraveling such challenges.

Relationships. As demonstrated at Grandview, the potential that exists within student-teacher relationships cannot be underestimated. A more critical service-learning should challenge educator's views of students "with no comforts, who do not eat well, who do not "dress nicely," who do not "speak correctly," who speak with their own syntax, semantics, and accent" (Freire, 2005, p. 128) and inspire relationships based in mutual respect, not sympathy. A concern for empowerment must be at the core of these relationships. McLaren (1989) cautions that while "sympathetic, affectionate, confidence-building relationships" are valuable, they must be "pursued within a pedagogical context in which the issue of self and social transformation is taken seriously" (p. 235). Relationships are an important support mechanism for students, but

perhaps their greatest pedagogical contribution is that the teacher will learn what happens in students' worlds. To this, Freire (2005) posits that teachers "need to know the universe of their [students'] dreams, the language with which they skillfully defend themselves from the aggressiveness of their world, what they know independently of the school, and how they know it" (p. 130). By knowing the student, the teacher enables equitable power arrangements and is better able to tap into students' knowledge and interests. These relationships are the essential building blocks of a transformational learning community.

Critical talk. Language is a cultural tool that enables people to think together (Mercer & Dawes, 2008). Specifically within service-learning, a reflective discourse is promoted by Billig (2012) as a way to deepen learning. In addition to reflection, critical talk would enhance service-learning. Pierce and Gilles (2008) explain that critical talk consists of critiques of students' views, while envisioning possibilities about the way things could be, and ultimately inspires to make change. A critical approach to service-learning should also incorporate Fine's (1991) concept of naming; identifying and defining the social and economic inequities that frame students' lives. In this way, students can create new meaning together by acknowledging the oppressions and injustices that are routinely ignored in schooling.

Need for critical talk was evident as participants in the study suggested that if they could just get their peers to act respectful (i.e., sit quietly and listen) the service-learning program would function better. In these moments, naming could have engaged students as experts not as problems. Critical forms of talk require intellectual courage and trust to unravel shifting world-views (Mercer & Dawes, 2008). Therefore, critical talk and relationships go hand in hand. In both, the teacher must espouse a willingness to relearn as they work alongside students to

uncover and transform their various interpretations of reality. Through such efforts, a community of learning, change, and new possibility can be constructed.

Equal access. A central aim among critical theorists is educational equality. The disproportionate statistics on the prevalence of service-learning opportunities for low-income students of color must not go unacknowledged. According to Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Wulsin (2008), only eight percent of students at low-performing schools report having access to service-learning classes. Service-learning practitioners must make a concerted effort to bring their pedagogy to the marginalized classrooms that demonstrate the greatest need and potential for empowerment. Additionally, within schools that have existing programs, high quality service-learning opportunities must be equally accessible to all students, not only awarded to an elite group of top achievers.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study concerned three students who became exceptionally dedicated to their school's service-learning program; clearly many perspectives are left unexplored. Experiences of the students who completed only the basic service-learning requirement and of those who were reluctant to participate in the program at all would bring an array of viewpoints to the research purpose. Within the school, not all students had the opportunities that were afforded to the research participants. Were these students able to move beyond resistance and experience a meaningful connection to the school and service-learning program, or did service remain an empty requirement in their view? Further research should explore the processes the reluctant student engaged in and identify how their experience differs from that of the participants in this study. By understanding why these students remained at the fringe, their stories would do much to clarify the service-learning practices that could be used to engage and empower all students.

This study presented one version of marginalized student experience, further work is needed to fully understand how service-learning legitimizes student experience, knowledge, and culture, and enables critique, especially for students in schools with high dropout rates. How does service-learning create a connection to the school environment and engage students in these schools? While this research occurred within the school walls, other studies may be situated in the community locales where students are immersed in the complexities of everyday life as they navigate shifting views of self, society, and other. Participatory action research studies that bring students in as experts such as Fine, Bloom, and Chajet's (2010) are particularly illuminating in helping researchers and educators re-define our limiting paradigms by learning the ways students view their worlds.

In addition to investigating the experiences of students, other studies may consider the perspectives of teachers. It would be helpful to document how, through service-learning, the teacher encounters students' worlds and the processes they engage in to develop an understanding of the student through reciprocal relationships, critical talk, and the formation of community. Capturing the viewpoints of teachers would add to the literature and provide further knowledge that could be considered in implementing empowerment-oriented service-learning programs.

Conclusion

The research presented here provided a holistic account of the spaces, relationships, and identities constructed by marginalized students through service-learning. Service-learning offered a meaningful experience to culturally non-dominant students which legitimized lived experience and enabled the construction of new social/intellectual spaces and the re-writing of self. Participants' identities expanded as they critiqued arrangements of power infusing social

structures and thereby developed a critical self-awareness. As change agents, participants experienced hope, fulfillment, and a relentless drive to uplift their communities. They also experienced the challenges of maintaining new, fragile identities in the harsh realities of their neighborhoods and in the hegemony of society as a whole.

It is imperative to gain a thorough understanding of how empowerment and self-authorship can become central to schooling. We must find ways to implement the ideals of critical theory; at Grandview Community Charter, this was through a service-learning program. I imagine that skeptics may argue that schools are for learning, not social critique. However, if schools remain places of oppression, what is it that students learn exactly? That to stay in school they must silence their voices, quell their resistance, and endure the degradation that inadequate and inequitable educational systems have to offer? Can we really be surprised when more students dropout, or more accurately are pushed out, than graduate?

If we are serious about equality in schooling, then we must address the opportunity gap that marginalized, predominately low-income students of color slip through every day. As we learn to engage students in critical pedagogy, the paradigms that enable oppressive, marginalizing practices and frameworks of schooling that silence and exclude will be dismantled. Marginalized classrooms are rich with the potential to become critical learning communities. As sites of empowerment, where student voice, experience, and culture are legitimized and made central to education, schools will do much to stem the dropout epidemic and other manifestations of educational inequalities.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1st Student Interview

1. Why did you enroll in Grandview?
2. Tell me about a positive school experience.
3. Tell me about a negative school experience.
4. How would you describe yourself as a student?
5. How would you describe yourself outside of school?
6. Describe your experiences with the service-learning program since your freshman year. Is there one experience that stands out as the most important to you?
7. What social issue did you choose to focus on for your service requirement? What experiences led you to this choice?

2nd Student Interview

1. Describe your initial experiences with your service activities. What is going well at your service site? Describe the interactions you have with others at the service site.
2. What do you hope to gain from working at your service organization?
3. How does your service organization relate to your classes?
4. How do you explain your service activities to family or friends attending another school?

3rd Student Interview

1. What projects are you currently involved in through service?

2. How are your expectations of the service experience different from your actual experience?
3. Tell me about one assignment or activity at the service site that you thought was difficult.
4. How do you believe the service organization is making a difference in this community?

4th Student Interview

1. Tell me about your experiences as a service-learner. Do you have any experiences that you think other people not engaged in service may not experience? Have these experiences ever been discussed in the classroom? If so, in what ways?
2. Describe your relationships with the service organization workers. Describe your relationships with other community members you interact with through service. How do you perceive them? How do you believe they perceive you?
3. Is there anything you would change about the work of the service organization? If so, describe.
4. What do you see as some of the causes of the issues (hunger, poverty, etc.) your service organization is working to address? Do you have any personal history with these problems that you would like to share?

5th Student Interview

1. Describe an experience from your service activities that is meaningful. Will this experience continue to impact you into your adulthood? How?
2. Describe how your perspective of the social issues (hunger, poverty, etc.) you are working with has changed over the course of your senior year?
3. Describe how service-learning impacted your experience of school? What did you learn through service-learning? Do you believe that others like you would benefit from such opportunities?

4. What is most important about your experience as a service-learner?
5. Do you believe that you made a difference to your community? Explain your perspectives of democracy and civic engagement? How is change created?

Appendix B

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Student Participant

As a parent/guardian of a student enrolled in Green Tech High, your child is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jaime L. Winans and supervised by Professor Bryant Griffith, Ph.D., who is on the faculty of the College of Education at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For your child to participate, we will need a signature from you at the bottom of this consent form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This case study will examine the experiences of high school students in an academic service-learning program at Green Tech High.

PROCEDURES

This study will be conducted during your child's regular scheduled course. If you give your consent for your child to participate in the study, (1) your child will be observed during service-learning activities, (2) your child will be asked to volunteer for a series of interviews with Jaime L. Winans, which will be audio-recorded, and (3) your child may be asked to voluntarily share their course work.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated physical risks or discomforts associated with the study. Participation or nonparticipation in the study will have no effect on your child's grade. There is a minimal risk of stress or embarrassment as the interviews may be personal in nature, but this is unlikely since your child may refuse to answer any question they do not want to answer and still participate in the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS

This study will benefit students and educators by providing insight to high school students' experiences and developing identities as they encounter and work to address social issues. The study of service-learning may provide insight to student empowerment. Students' perspectives will contribute to the current state of knowledge of not only service-learning but also of equality in education. Approximately 46 percent of all United States high schools practice service-learning, yet little is known about how students experience this pedagogical method.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no payment for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your child's identity will be protected, and information that is obtained through this study will not be connected with them. To provide this protection, pseudonyms will be used instead of actual names for the students, the service-learning coordinator, and the school selected for the study. These pseudonyms will be used when presenting individuals' written or spoken statements or excerpts from the teacher or students' written work in any reports, conference papers, or articles about the study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not your child will participate in this study. You may withdraw your child at any time without any consequences. Your child may refuse to answer any questions they do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw your child from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact Jaime L. Winans, (361) 443-8329 or Dr. Bryant Griffith at (361) 825-2446, College of Education, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue your child's participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of their participation in the study.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to allow my child to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Parent/Guardian of Student Participant

Signature of Parent/Guardian of Student Participant

Date

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Student Participant

As a student enrolled in Green Tech High, you are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jaime L. Winans and supervised by Professor Bryant Griffith, Ph.D., who is on the faculty of the College of Education at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For you to participate, we will need a signature from you as a participant at the bottom of this consent form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This case study will examine the experiences of high school students in an academic service-learning program at Green Tech High.

PROCEDURES

This study will be conducted during your regular scheduled course. If you give your consent to participate in the study, (1) you will be observed during service-learning activities, (2) you will be asked to volunteer for a series of interviews with Jaime L. Winans, which will be audio-recorded, and (3) you may be asked to voluntarily share your course work.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated physical risks or discomforts associated with the study. Participation or nonparticipation in the study will have no effect on your grade. There is a minimal risk of stress or embarrassment as the interviews may be personal in nature, but this is unlikely and you may refuse to answer any question you do not want to answer and still participate in the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS

This study will benefit students and educators by providing insight to high school students' experiences and developing identities as they encounter and work to address social issues. The study of service-learning may provide insight to student empowerment. Students' perspectives will contribute to the current state of knowledge of not only service-learning but also of equality in education. Approximately 46 percent of all United States high schools practice service-learning, yet little is known about how students experience this pedagogical method.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no payment for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your identity will be protected, and information that is obtained through this study will not be connected with you. To provide this protection, pseudonyms will be used instead of actual names for the students, the service-learning coordinator, and the school selected for the study. These pseudonyms will be used when presenting individuals' written or spoken statements or excerpts from the teacher or students' written work in any reports, conference papers, or articles about the study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time without any consequences. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact Jaime L. Winans, (361) 443-8329 or Dr. Bryant Griffith at (361) 825-2446, College of Education, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in the study.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Student Participant

Signature of Student Participant

Date

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Service-learning Coordinator Participant

As a Service-learning Coordinator at Green Tech High, you are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jaime L. Winans and supervised by Professor Bryant Griffith, Ph.D., who is on the faculty of the College of Education at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For you to participate, we will need a signature from you as a participant at the bottom of this consent form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This case study will examine the experiences of high school students in an academic service-learning program at Green Tech High.

PROCEDURES

This study will be conducted during your regular scheduled course. If you give your consent to participate in the study, (1) you will be observed during class meetings, (2) you may be asked to volunteer for an interview with Jaime L. Winans, which may be audio-recorded, and (3) you may be asked to voluntarily share classroom artifacts, such as your course syllabus, written instructions, or written student feedback.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated physical risks or discomforts associated with the study. Participation or nonparticipation in the study will have no effect on your students' grades or your overall teaching performance. There is a minimal risk of stress or embarrassment as the nature of interviews may be personal in nature, but this is unlikely and you may refuse to answer any question you do not want to answer and still participate in the study.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS

This study will benefit students and educators by providing insight to high school students' experiences and developing identities as they encounter and work to address social issues. The study of service-learning may provide insight to student empowerment. Students' perspectives will contribute to the current state of knowledge of not only service-learning but also of equality in education. Approximately 46 percent of all United States high schools practice service-learning, yet little is known about how students experience this pedagogical method.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

There will be no payment for participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your identity will be protected, and information that is obtained through this study will not be connected with you. To provide this protection, pseudonyms will be used instead of actual names for the students, the teacher, and the school selected for the study. These pseudonyms will be

used when presenting individuals' written or spoken statements or excerpts from the teacher or students' written work in any reports, conference papers, or articles about the study.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether or not to participate in this study. You may withdraw at any time without any consequences. You may refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please feel free to contact Jaime L. Winans (361) 443-8329 or Dr. Bryant Griffith at (361) 825-2446, College of Education, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because of your participation in the study.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT

I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Service-learning Coordinator Participant

Signature of Service-learning Coordinator Participant

Date