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The current push for K-12 service-learning, particularly as an intervention strategy for “at-risk” youth, makes more urgent the need for critical service-learning constructions that counter deficit ideologies. Responding to this need, the researcher designed, implemented, and researched a course-embedded service-learning project conducted with Latin@ high school students considered “at-risk” by school personnel. To explore the possibilities of creating a critical, social justice, asset-oriented service-learning project in a core classroom setting specifically designed to foster students' critical agency, the researcher and students blended the service-learning with Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) methods. The findings of the postcritical ethnography of this course-embedded YPAR guided service-learning project indicate that the project did create a unique space within the school for fostering critical agency. Additionally, the work demonstrates how service-learning and YPAR can inform one another, creating a more asset-based and social justice-oriented practice. Finally, the findings model how teachers can successfully navigate the pedagogical, ideological, and practical challenges of fully embedding YPAR and/or service-learning projects into their core classroom practice.

(RE)FRAMING SERVICE-LEARNING WITH YOUTH PARTICIPATORY ACTION
RESEARCH: EXAMINING STUDENTS' CRITICAL AGENCY

by

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

The framing of marginalized youth as “at-risk” is common in educational policy and practice. The so-called achievement gap is well-established as decades of research have shown that students of color score below their White peers on standardized tests (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2005). Research also demonstrates that these youth are more likely than their White peers to drop out of school, go to prison, become teenage parents, join gangs, and engage in other behaviors that researchers and scholars deem “risky” (Gonzales, Wagner, & Brunton, 1993; Scales, Roehlkepartain, Neal Kielsmeier, & Benson, 2006; Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008). Educational commentators also posit that cultures of poverty (Ruby Payne, 2005) set up life-long learning deficits that marginalized students cannot overcome without much personal effort. Seeing environmental factors as defects preventing student success, policy-makers and educators constantly create reform and intervention efforts aimed at “fixing” these “at-risk” students and their home cultures. But while we educators have been designing and implementing reform efforts for at least the last 30 years (if we limit our conversation to the post-*A Nation At Risk* era), we have achieved very little success, at least in terms of closing these gaps. As some scholars (and students themselves have begun to) articulate, the reason our reforms fail may be the deficit ideology framing these efforts. Our traditional, neoliberal understandings of youth, academic success and effort, and “at-

risk”-ness prevent us from addressing the broader social and structural issues that really create the achievement gap. As students in Torre and Fine’s (2008) participatory action research project state, “When you call it an achievement gap, that means it’s our fault. The real problem is an opportunity gap—let’s place the responsibility where it belongs—in society and in the schools” (p. 29).

Mirra, Morrell, Cain, Scorza, and Ford (2013) elaborate on this opportunity gap between youth of color and their White peers, asserting that, in addition to the structural inequities that contribute to disparities in academic and economic outcomes, “schools serving low-income minority youth fail to provide them with the curricular learning experiences necessary to promote civic engagement” (p. 2), creating a disempowering gap between people of color and White populations in terms of civic and political knowledge, engagement, and agency. To close these opportunity gaps, we must reorient our efforts. Instead of trying to change the youth themselves through deficit-oriented interventions, we must change the kinds of educational experiences we offer to these youth and embrace pedagogies that empower and value marginalized youth as active producers of knowledge and potential change agents.

Recently, service-learning has become popular as a potential intervention strategy for “at-risk” youth. Promoters cite service-learning’s potential for increasing student engagement with content and school itself (Arrington, 2010), cultivating character and personal responsibility (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008), and developing efficacy in students (McIntosh & Munoz, 2009). But much of the research and scholarly writing on service-learning, including service-learning as a reform for “at-risk” youth, works from

within a neoliberal, deficit ideology framework aimed at “fixing” these children and making them more “personally responsible.” Though there are critical service-learning advocates who actively counter this traditional paradigm in their practice, even they assume participants have a certain level of privilege (if not outright whiteness) (Butin, 2006). In other words, service-learning in general and as a critical pedagogy is under-theorized and under-researched as an intervention for marginalized youths. I believe in its potential, specifically its potential to create spaces where students of all backgrounds can develop critical agency, but the hierarchical nature of service-learning and its great potential to reify stereotypes and deficit ideology (as well as its traditional “whiteness”) leave me wary.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), while not as widely used as service-learning, has a strong record of success as an intervention strategy with “at-risk” youth specifically because those who employ it refuse to frame youth as such (Romero et al., 2008; Morrell, 2008; Arrington, 2010; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Working from critical paradigms, YPAR users address the remediation of minoritized youth by eliminating the deficit, individualist ideology of so many reform efforts and working instead from an asset model that deeply respects youth and their cultures, sees them as leaders and change agents, and helps them learn the skills they need to understand and then challenge systems of oppression. Unlike service-learning, YPAR is predominately practiced with youth of color and practitioners understand their work as political (Camarota & Fine, 2008). In other words, YPAR is fundamentally about developing critical agency and eliminating the academic *and* civic engagement opportunity gaps that perpetuate broader

socioeconomic and political inequalities (Mirra et al., 2013). YPAR students who succeed academically do so because they are engaged with the subject matter and see its usefulness, not just for the completion of a random task or for future employment, but for analyzing and countering their own marginalization. Such work is empowering rather than stultifying, and students are not asked to leave behind who they are in order to achieve. But YPAR has not found widespread popularity as an intervention strategy within schools. Perhaps simply fewer educators and policy-makers are familiar with it than with other strategies. Perhaps structural and practical challenges deter its implementation. But service-learning involves many of these same challenges and still finds support. Unlike much service-learning, however, YPAR challenges the status quo. It shakes up power hierarchies within the school (Phillips, Berg, Rodriguez, & Morgan, 2010) and questions prevailing neoliberal, deficit ideologies (Romero et al., 2008). It may be that mainstream educators hesitate to sanction it as a strategy because of these critical orientations, despite its success as an education intervention.

In this project, I drew upon service-learning and YPAR scholarship believing that a practice borrowing elements from each would help me create an institutional space (a public high school “Spanish for Native Speakers II” class) where participatory action research and service met to foster critical agency—the ability to take considered, change-seeking actions in one’s personal life and community—in students framed by their school as “at-risk.” As students developed senses of critical agency, many also found new and positive ways to both resist their marginalization and engage with school (Romero et al.,

2008; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Through my ethnography on our YPAR project, I addressed the following research questions:

1. How did students labeled by school personnel as “at-risk” experience critical agency throughout their participation in a YPAR-infused service-learning project conducted as part of their high school coursework?
2. How might YPAR and service-learning be infused together within an institutional, core classroom context?
3. How might a YPAR-guided service-learning project within an institutional, core classroom context counter deficit ideologies and make space for academic and civic engagement among marginalized youth?

Background Context

For this study, I pulled service-learning and YPAR practices together and employed them in a public high school classroom. To set the context for this study, I first explore service-learning, defining it as a practice, discussing its goals, and describing how it is implemented within neoliberal versus critical theoretical frameworks. Following the discussion of critical service-learning, I describe YPAR’s theoretical framework and how it may intersect with critical service-learning. I then explore YPAR’s practices and goals. With the two techniques defined, I then discuss this study’s setting, describing briefly the district-level service-learning initiative and the school, classroom, and curriculum in which I worked. Finally, I describe the YPAR-guided service-learning project that I implemented for this study.

What is Service-Learning?

In her manual for K-9 service-learning, Stephens (1995) offers a simple definition for the practice, describing it as “a merger of community service and classroom learning that strengthens both and generates a whole greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 10). Bringle, Hatcher, and McIntosh (2006) elaborate on both the service and the learning elements of Stephens’ definition, stating that service-learning is “a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in and reflect on an organized service activity that meets identified community needs” (p. 12). Their definition firmly locates service-learning within the curriculum (as opposed to it being an extra-curricular activity) and implies a process structure for the experience—organization, participation, and reflection. Harkavy (2004) reiterates some of these elements in his operational definition, describing service-learning as “collaborative, action-oriented, reflective, real-world problem solving” (pp. 4-5). This definition provides descriptors for Bringle et al.’s process, listing adjectives that begin to indicate *how* students, teachers, and communities should engage in the process. Institutions promoting service-learning also contribute operational definitions to the conversation. For example, Paul County Schools’ (PCS)¹ service-learning initiative describes the pedagogy as “a way of teaching and learning that connects positive and meaningful action in the community with academic learning, personal growth and civic responsibility” (2014, p. 3). The PCS definition, while reiterating the commonly understood service-learning process, also identifies its goals (academic learning, personal

¹ Pseudonym for the district in which my project took place

development, and civic responsibility). Pulling from these definitions, service-learning can be understood as a curricular experience consisting of knowledge-building coursework, a community project, and a reflection period in which connections are made between the coursework and the project.

While most work on service-learning shares a common notion of what “learning” means (the knowledge and/or skills that a given course seeks to impart), there is less consensus regarding the service element. However, despite its variety in practice, it is generally understood that what separates service-learning from experiential learning or internships, apprenticeships or fieldworks, is an attention to “community needs.” In other words, service-learning is not career practice (as in an internship or fieldwork experience), nor is it meant to be the simple application of academic skills in the “real world” (as in the collection and analysis of stream water or the construction of a playground to practice geometry). For such activities to be considered service-learning, the action must fulfill an authentic need, and the identification of that need should occur in collaboration with human beings from the community. Additionally, service-learning is not simply volunteerism (as in serving food in a soup kitchen or painting a mural in a local park); these activities may provide a service, and they may involve some content area skills, but true service-learning activities must reinforce or require students to acquire new academic knowledge and/or skills that explicitly connect to coursework and include opportunities for reflection.

Research studies on best practices in service-learning state that high-quality service-learning makes space for youth voice, explicitly ties the service to curricular

standards, attends to diversity, includes structured reflection, involves meaningful contact with the community served, occurs within reciprocal and mutually beneficial community partnerships, monitors progress, and is sufficient in duration and intensity (Thomson, 2006; Billig & Weah, 2008). However, it is my observation that much service-learning, even projects proposed in the very same manuals and research articles that promote these best practices, fails to truly engage students with members of the community served, to allow youth ownership of the projects, or to connect the learning to curricular standards (usually because service-learning is relegated to extra-curricular status). Some of this disparity may be due to institutional and practical constraints such as access, scheduling, funding, and difficulty of implementation. Additionally, the goals for the service-learning project and its theoretical underpinnings also affect the form that “service” takes and how it is integrated into the overall experience.

The goals for service-learning typically fall into three main categories: academic, personal, and social/political. The previous quote from PCS’s Service-Learning Handbook illustrates this threefold mission, as does Bringle et al.’s (2006) description of service-learning as a process that can give students “further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility” (p. 12). Academic goals may include the acquisition or reinforcement of particular content knowledge or skills, self-reflective knowledge, cultural knowledge, and (in certain paradigms) critical knowledge. Personal goals may include acquiring critical/higher order thinking skills and intercultural competency, promoting moral and ethical development and character education, and increasing self-

motivation and school engagement. Related to these personal goals, social and political goals may include promoting cooperation, building community partnerships, educating for democracy, fostering civic/social responsibility, encouraging student agency, developing citizenship skills, and improving school climate. Research studies and program evaluations have demonstrated service-learning's effectiveness in meeting all of these goals to various extents (e.g. Battistoni, 2002; Dudderar & Tover, 2003; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Housman, Meaney, & Wilcox, 2012; Nieto, 2006; Ponder, Vander Veldt, & Lewis-Ferrell, 2011; Seider, Rabinowitz, & Gillmor, 2011; Wang, 2011; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). As my project focuses specifically on critical agency as a goal, I more deeply explore the research on service-learning and agency in my literature review chapter.

Theoretical Frameworks for Service-Learning

While service-learning practitioners and researchers may use a variety of theoretical frameworks to underpin their work, for the purposes of this study, I discuss the two most pertinent to my work—neoliberalism and critical theory. In this section, I first attend to neoliberalism which, though it remains unstated, is the guiding theoretical orientation in my school district's service-learning program. Second, I describe the critical theoretical tradition within service-learning, paying close attention to how it challenges the neoliberal framework. Because my project operates from a critical perspective within a system promoting neoliberal ideals, how these two theoretical orientations interact was salient in both my YPAR-guided service-learning project's design and in my analysis of our experiences conducting it.

The neoliberal orientation. While the process, goals, and best practices of service-learning are well-established in research, most service-learning scholars and practitioners are less clear about the theoretical perspective from which they operate (Ziegert & McGoldrick, 2004). Often, no theoretical perspective is articulated, except in the case of those working from a critical theoretical framework. Attempting to label this unspoken theoretical underpinning, Westheimer and Kahn (2004) use the term “traditionalist” to describe the perspective that assumes an ethic of personal responsibility and individualism. Such a perspective could also be understood as reflective of a neoliberal and deficit ideology. While unstated, this paradigm is apparent in the framing of traditional service-learning goals and in the design of the projects. Before describing how these theoretical frameworks manifest in service-learning, I elaborate on what I mean by “neoliberal” and “deficit” ideologies.

Educators and policy makers operating from a neoliberal ideology in education promote an ethic of individual self-interest, the privatization of public works, a reduction in labor costs, and a general belief that free-market-style competition is the most effective means of management and motivation (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Kumar & Hill; 2009a). This ideology manifests in school choice programs; the privatization of previously public educational services and revenue sources; punitive high-stakes testing programs; teacher pay, benefit, and tenure debates; competition between states, districts, schools and teachers for funding and status; the application of business models and free-market ethics to policies and procedures; and the framing of education as a servant to the economy (Kumar & Hill, 2009b). But it is important to note in a discussion of neoliberalism’s

current influence on education that these tensions did not originate with Reaganomics, globalization, or the high-tech revolution. Neoliberalism can be seen as the unique confluence of these factors coupled with the longer-standing philosophy of individualism; faith in free-market capitalism; and sexist, racist, classist, and xenophobic tendencies.

Deficit ideology is “the idea that oppressed people are responsible for their relative lots in life due to their individual and collective deficiencies” (Gorski, 2008, p. 138). Moreover, proponents of deficit ideology value only dominant cultural capital and dominant epistemology. Those operating from different funds of knowledge or epistemological orientations are seen as lacking. Difference (from the dominant culture) is thus positioned as a liability, as deficient. Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright (2008) describe deficit ideology’s effect on educational reform in terms of the social disorganization thesis which argues that “urban youth learn ‘ghetto related’ behaviors, including disrespect for authority, indifference toward educational achievement, and lack of work ethic from other urban residents who have given up on legitimate means for economic security” (p. 1). Elaborating on this notion of difference as deficient, those who ascribe to this thesis maintain that if youth’s choices are results of this urban decay, then the emphasis of intervention programs should be on this decay and on the youth’s choices. Thus, deficit ideology intertwines with neoliberalism’s competitive, meritocratic, individualist tenets, producing a system in which social issues are understood as personal ones and individual responsibility and choice are seen as both the cause and the solution to these issues. The onus for change (and the blame for one’s condition) is firmly situated in the individual (or in a stereotyped collection of individuals), thereby obscuring the role

of privilege and systems of power and oppression at the social and structural levels (Villenas, 2001).

Character education goals for service-learning underpinned by neoliberal and deficit ideology focus on fostering students who are neighborly, obedient, trustworthy, helpful, and hard-working. As such, service-learning activities tend also to focus on personal and interpersonal accountability with little or no attention paid to systemic, social, or political factors that contribute to the issues addressed by the project. Such a perspective is illustrated in the PCS Service-Learning Handbook (2014). The Handbook lists categories of “worthy causes” that may be addressed by service-learning projects. Three of the categories explicitly mention human beings: “homeless and hungry people,” “severely disabled,” and “the elderly and young children.” This linguistic focus on humans as opposed to the issues affecting them represents the neoliberal tendency to frame problems on a personal level. It encourages the student “serving” the homeless (or hungry, or elderly, or disabled, or young) person to see that person as an example of their social label, without being called to actually examine that social label or address the context in which it arose and attached itself to this person. The individualism exemplified here encourages students to see social problems and their solutions in terms of personal responsibility, helpfulness, and hard-work.

I also found evidence of a deficit ideology in the way that those served are framed within certain service-learning constructions. In the Paul County Schools example, wording the appropriate targets for service in terms of the human being rather than the social issue indicates that that the human needs “fixing” instead of the social issue. This

framing positions the targets of service as “vulnerable,” “needy” or “lacking” in comparison with the students who will “help” or “handle” them. In such situations, reciprocity, considered a basic tenet of best practice service-learning (Billig & Weah, 2008; Thomson, 2006), becomes about preventing the students from being “used” by this needy community (Brown, 2001). In other words, it is assumed that the community is benefiting from the students’ work and the focus is on the student servers and making sure that they too are “getting something” of value from the community being served. Three prominent legal challenges in which families sued the school districts to stop students’ mandatory participation in service-learning were born of this concern over student servers being used as free labor in violation of their Thirteenth Amendment rights (*Steirer v. Bethlehem Area School District*, 1993; *Immediato v. Rye Neck School District*, 1996; *Herndan v. Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Board of Education*, 1997). This understanding of reciprocity reflects a deficit ideology because it assumes that the communities served and the work done in them do not have anything to offer students and that steps must be taken to protect the students’ gains, as opposed to making sure that communities are protected from the intrusion of the students (a primary concern within critical service-learning which I describe in the next section).

This neoliberal, deficit-based theoretical framework also tends to privilege the academic “learning” element in service-learning over the “service” component (Mitchell, 2008). For example, distinctions between volunteerism and service are drawn, not based on the kinds of interactions that occur or the ideological differences between such kinds

of interactions, but rather on the connection of the activity to learning. As an illustration, the PCS Service-Learning Handbook (2014) states:

Service-Learning is more than just simple volunteering. In the process of service to their school and/or community, students learn a lot about themselves and their responsibilities as a citizen while making connections with what they are learning in schools. (p. 4)

The activity could be the same, the reasons for engagement could be the same, but for volunteerism to be service, the student must make curricular connections and go through a formal process of reflection in order to “learn a lot.” The Handbook goes on to provide two examples of how to turn separate “learning” and “service” into “service-learning.” The first, measuring body mass index, relates to a health curriculum and the second, using a microscope to study water samples, connects to a science curriculum. These “learning” pieces are then connected to “service” components to form a “service-learning” project, organizing a walk to reduce obesity in the first case and gathering data on stream health to present to a local pollution control agency in the second. In each case, the focus is primarily on specific curricular skills or knowledge and the service is conceived of as a means to practice in a real-world context this skill and knowledge. While the community may be served and consciousness about obesity and pollution may be raised as an ancillary result of such projects, this is not positioned as a primary goal of the project, nor is it specifically scaffolded as part of the “learning.”

Critical orientations. Critical service-learning, while adhering to the same general best practices and process as traditional service-learning, speaks back to the neoliberal and deficit ideology of traditional service-learning by filtering the work

through a critical lens. Other scholars like McKay (2010), Marullo and Edwards (2000), Rice and Pollack (2000), and Rosenberger (2000) have labeled their work critical service-learning, but their definitions tend to be more philosophical, seeking to point out differences in the theoretical framework and aims for their work versus that of other non-critical service-learning practitioners. Mitchell (2008) summarizes critical service-learning as a “social change orientation; working to redistribute power and developing authentic relationships are the elements most cited in the literature to differentiate the practice from traditional service-learning models” (p. 62). Pulling from these scholars and the traditions of critical pedagogy, critical youth studies, and critical race theory (which I explore in more detail in the following section), I define critical service learning in terms of four core components. First, it is critically reflexive in the sense that it encourages the self-examination of one’s place and role in the social hierarchy throughout the service-learning process. Second, it is concerned with raising questions about the social and cultural milieu that supports, produces, or counters the issue or cause being addressed through the service-learning. For example, if the cause being addressed is homelessness, the service-learning would not only ameliorate an immediate need within the homeless community, but would also seek to understand (and change) the social conditions that perpetuate homelessness and that stigmatize it. Third, critical service-learning would raise these questions and support this reflexivity by focusing on the relationships formed during the service-learning experience. These relationships include those between the “servers” and the “served” as well as those within each group and between the teachers and the students. Fourth, critical service-learning is

transformative. This kind of service-learning is “unapologetic in its aim to dismantle structures of injustice” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50) as it actively seeks to change minds, change conditions, and foster in all stakeholders a sense of “power with” others (Bell, 1997, p. 4) that encourages long-term democratic responsibility and action.

Critical service-learning thus offers a critique of traditional service-learning practice, particularly with regards to its potential to reify notions of social hierarchy, stereotype, and cultural hegemony that counter its social justice goals. Stenhouse and Jarrett (2012) find in their analysis of pre-service teachers’ service-learning experiences that for many students, stereotypes, deficit assumptions, and feelings of helplessness and superiority were reinforced as a result of their participation in such projects. Yet their intercultural competency, personal and social responsibility, and civic engagement ratings still improved. Operating from a neoliberal perspective, a student can “get along” with others, navigate intercultural systems, be charitable and civically/politically engaged, and still retain his or her feelings of superiority. Critical service-learning proponents, however, find this situation problematic and fundamentally disagree with any pedagogy that perpetuates inequity at any level.

For critical service-learning proponents, the service piece of the service-learning construction is the most problematic element. In his examination of the dangers to social justice present in much service-learning, Sheffield (2011) clarifies the notion of “service” in what I understand as critical service-learning by distinguishing it from charity and volunteerism on both practical and theoretical levels. Sheffield (2011) describes charity as a one-way transaction of resources from the privileged to those perceived by the

privileged as needy. In other words, rather than questioning the status quo, charity is fundamentally designed to re-inscribe social hierarchy and unequal power relations and thus can have no place in a critical service-learning pedagogy. Marullo and Edwards (2000) assert that regardless of the kind of contact occurring within charity work, such acts are fundamentally moral rather than political, and as such, often result in feelings of moral superiority among the “servers” because they leave the sociopolitical structures at play unquestioned. Hytten (2011) describes this kind of “service” as “help absent relationship” (p. 76) and like Sheffield and Marullo and Edwards, emphasizes that this lack of reflection on or desire to change the underlying inequities that produced the “needy” in the first place can re-inscribe deficit ideologies and dehumanizing stereotypes for those in privileged positions. Thus, the ideology that underpins charity is one of inequality, deficit-based, and thus antithetical to critical service-learning.

Critical service-learning advocates also question the underlying ideology of volunteerism, and with it, much of the service-learning promoted in institutions like Paul County Schools and in frameworks like Stephens’ (1995) and Thomsen’s (2006) often-used manuals. Sheffield describes volunteerism as giving freely of one’s self, but he notes that in its current connotation, volunteerism tends to lack “an understanding of democratic community building and connecting” because it fundamentally ignores the collective and privileges “the autonomous citizen making a personal choice” (p. 77). It focuses on the present (task-oriented) instead of the past or future (context and change-oriented). Villaverde (2008) also distinguishes service-learning from volunteerism, describing the former as multidirectional, in other words, not a one-way transfer. Like

Sheffield, she also indicates that service-learning must consider the past and future, stating that “it requires students to use what they know in ways that do not re-inscribe current power hierarchies as they enter unknown territories and partner with others to accomplish mutually designed goals” (p. 137). Since volunteerism does not require such context analysis or change agency from students, it is not a reflective or transformational practice and not conducive to critical service-learning.

Distinguishing it from other theoretical bends towards service-learning, critical service-learning also promotes a notion of “true generosity” which “involves disrupting relationships of charity and working instead towards bond of solidarity” (Hyttén, 2011, p. 78). Similarly, Sheffield (2011) describes critical service-learning as involving “mutuality” (p. 78). He relates mutuality to reciprocity, the notion that the relationships formed in service experiences should not just be mutually beneficial but also blur the lines between “server” and the “served” through the acknowledgement that each party has needs and resources and that both are giving and taking through the experience. In other words, unlike charity or volunteerism, mutuality or reciprocity is a multidirectional transaction. Reciprocity from the critical perspective is meant to “eliminate, or dilute, the hegemony between haves and have-nots that exists prior to a community service experience” (Sheffield, 2011, p. 79), not simply to ensure equality in the exchange as is the focus in other theoretical frameworks.

This reciprocity or mutuality affects the academic goals of critical service-learning. Critical learning experiences foreground relationships, critical reflexivity (of the self and the community), and action. Providing some theoretical grounding for this

kind of learning, Kronick, Cunningham, and Gourley (2011) describe these learning relationships as horizontal, not hierarchical, in that they are founded on listening to the concerns of the group and learning from that group as all participants work together to meet a need. Thus, they state that the “primary goal of service-learning is not to push the boundaries of scientific knowledge, but to work with another to attend to the other, to learn about the other” in order to “create or expand knowledge” by “seeing a situation from a different perspective” (p. 23). They connect this kind of learning to action theory, or the idea that one learns about social issues by attempting to change them and examining the effectiveness and implications of the attempt at change. Kronick et al. (2011) describe how this cycle of “sensing, reflecting, and acting leads to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation” (p. 32), the highest “critical” thinking levels on Bloom’s Taxonomy. As students problem-pose and problem-solve with their community partners, they find solutions that work and solutions that do not. Either outcome helps them to develop the next problem and solution. Cooks and Scharrer (2006) describe how this action learning can contribute to participants’ senses of agency:

In the [critical service learning] context...useful knowledges are those that emerge in the context of experience, in interaction with others—that inform us how to go on, to coordinate our meanings to accomplish something. When people construct reality through conversation they create new possibilities for agency. (p. 51)

This lateral thinking is foundational to this action theory of learning. Like Kronick et al.’s (2011) horizontal thinking, lateral thinking is the knowledges and skills cultivated through close interaction between the “servers” and the “served.” McMillan

(2002) expands on this idea of lateral thinking in her work on service-learning and knowledge reproduction. She describes service-learning as a space of boundary crossing and positions the learning component as a negotiation between the vertical knowledge of the institution (the curriculum) and the horizontal, or common and contextually-specific knowledge, of the community. For students, this boundary negotiation challenges their perceived truths and opens spaces for reflexivity and problem posing and solving. Drawing on Zlotkowski's work, McMillan goes on to describe the ways that such boundary crossing also encourages students to shift their understanding of "knowledge as self-interest and private good" to "knowledge as civic responsibility and public good" (Zlotkowski as cited in McMillan, 2002, p. 64). Villaverde (2008) also discusses service-learning's potential as a space for the co-construction of knowledge, stating that learning occurs when students "suspend any assumptions of absolute knowing...and address real needs...through active reflection and engagement with the political, cultural, and historical issues of the specific location or context" (p. 137).

In other words, to fit within the critical framework previously articulated, the learning focused on in service-learning should be the kind of learning that can *only* occur through the service-learning process. The practice of academic skills does not require community contact, though such an environment may provide rich opportunities to do so meaningfully and successfully. But such gains can be attained through other experiential learning opportunities. What service-learning uniquely provides in terms of learning opportunity is knowledge production through lateral thinking, action theory, and border crossings. This kind of learning can only occur in communion with others. It makes

spaces for critical thinking, reflexivity, and transformative action. There is room for content acquisition as well, but it is achieved not through hierarchical, one-way transactions, but through relationships and change-seeking interactions with others. Unlike a focus on learning that positions the service component as itself a servant to the higher goal of academics (a standpoint that has great potential to reify social hierarchy, cultural hegemony, and deficit ideology), the kind of learning conducive to a critical service-learning cannot be separated from the service experience. Instead, it is integral to it. This kind of learning is also central to YPAR, and the action research structure of YPAR may provide a helpful guide for implementing it in service-learning projects.

YPAR's Theoretical Framework

YPAR, like critical service-learning, is based in critical traditions that center cooperative learning, social consciousness-raising, transformation, and social justice. It also critiques neoliberal, deficit ideologies in education, specifically countering how those perspectives construct youth and “at-risk”-ness and how those constructions result in marginalizing policies and practices. Ginwright (2008) discusses how youths were until recently viewed as property of their families or wards of the state, thereby positioned as subordinate and relatively powerless. He also posits two current constructions of youth: youth-as-passive-consumer and youth-as-threat. Ginwright understands the youth-as-passive-consumer in terms of youth engagement with democracy—youth are not allowed active participation nor are their rights fully protected in law and policy as a result of this restriction. Moreover, this passivity is understood as developmentally appropriate. Developmental theorists, like Piaget, indicate that youth are

not yet capable of logical and abstract thought (or are only beginning to acquire such abilities) and as such, need to be managed and protected by adults. Thus, even if no longer seen as property or wards of the state, youth are still understood as democratically and developmentally powerless.

The idea of youth-as-passive-consumer can be extended to the realm of school, as well, in which students are seen as *tabulas rasa* or empty vessels to be filled by all-knowing adults (Freire, 1998). This banking model of education is fundamentally deficit-based in that it denies the value of any knowledge or skill a student may possess that is not passively acquired through schooling. Youth are again understood as powerless because they are only permitted to consume, not produce or act with, knowledge. And while it is older than neoliberalism, the positioning of youths as passive consumers is reinforced in an ideology that privileges competitive consumer capitalism and meritocracy as the ultimate method of management and motivation.

Ginwright's second description of youth-as-threat is also older than neoliberalism, dating at least back to the 1800s at which time school reform efforts centered on getting (largely poor immigrant) youth off the streets and into the schools where they could be assimilated into American value systems and tracked into industrial jobs (Nasaw, 1979). Hall's 1905 invention of adolescence as a stage of development lent scientific credence to longer-standing fears of youth-run-amok. A social Darwinist, Hall posited that adolescence corresponded to humanity's developmental period of "savagery, vagrancy, and nomadic life" (Nasaw, 1979, p. 88). Tagged with this new label, adolescent youth were firmly positioned as potential threats to the social order. Education became, in part,

a means of control and domination for all of these “savage vagrants,” but particularly, as Nasaw points out, for immigrant youth and youth of color. This perception of youth, combined with a Piagetian-inspired perspective on their thought capacities, positions youth, particularly adolescents and people of color, as in need of both control and protection.

This somewhat paradoxical framing of youth as potentially threatening, politically powerless, passive, and in need of both control and protection (particularly marginalized youth) when steeped in the individualism of neoliberalism and deficit ideology produces a particular understanding of minoritized youth. For one, it positions the youth as a nexus of social ills. They are both the cause of the ill and the potential solution; thus many reform efforts informed by neoliberalism and deficit ideology target the student (or a community of certain students) and focus on filling his or her vessel with the dominant cultural capital (Payne, 2005). These projects may come in the form of scripted curricula, character education initiatives, mentoring programs, intensified accountability measures, and recently, service-learning programs. But what they all have in common is the notion that it is the student and their community/culture that must be fixed, made to be more like the dominant culture, and that such change will result in academic and economic opportunity (Akom, Cammarota, & Ginworth, 2008). The schools as institutions remain unquestioned, as do the myth of meritocracy; systems of socioeconomic power; and the racism, classism, ethnocentrism, and nativism that foster “at-risk”-ness in the first place.

Critical youth studies adherents actively reject the traditional, deficit-based, neoliberal-influenced construction of youth previously described. Cammarota and Fine

(2008) describe the central tenet of critical youth studies as a belief that “young people have the ability to analyze their social context, to collectively engage in critical research, and resist repressive state and ideological institutions” (p. 4). In other words, instead of viewing youth as passive consumers or as potential threats, youth are seen as potential agents, having assets and aspirations that can and should be engaged for positive social change. Because traditional methods of schooling, including traditional reform efforts that take a patronizing and pathological view of youth and “at-risk”-ness, refuse to engage students as assets and agents, they continue to fail these students who see no reason to acquiesce to their disempowering and assimilative demands.

By repositioning youth as active producers of knowledge and change agents and making spaces for youth to live out this new positioning, critical youth studies adherents also raise questions about the ideologies that produce oppressive notions of youth and terms like “at-risk” or “underperforming.” As Quijada Cerecer, Cahill, and Bradley (2013) state, critical youth studies encourages youth and their adult allies to ask “why some youth are marked as deviant, sexually promiscuous, and violent individuals who need discipline and punishment, but other young people are seen as innocent and pure and in need of protection” (p. 217). To fully engage with this question, critical youth studies must intertwine with other critical traditions, most explicitly in the case of YPAR, with critical race theory.

Critical race theory (CRT), like critical youth studies, examines systems of power and social identity constructions that serve to privilege and oppress, but race instead of youth is the nexus for analysis. Since YPAR is commonly executed for students of color

by students of color (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Nygreen, 2010), in order to fully examine “at-risk”-ness and the deficit ideology that compounds oppression for youth of color (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009), several tenets of CRT are particularly useful. First, CRT contends that racism is embedded throughout our institutions, policies, and practices (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). Thus, when analyzing the experiences of marginalized youth in schools, race and racism must be brought to the fore. But while race is a central factor, it is not the only factor, and thus, another tenet of CRT, intersectionality, is often employed. Cammarota and Fine (2008) highlight YPAR practitioners’ use of intersectionality to “analyze power relations through multiple axes...Race intersects with gender, class, and sexuality within typical PAR inquiries” (p. 6). Additionally, CRT critiques “equality under the law” notions and colorblind ideologies and draws on the theme of interest convergence to examine how these power relations result in oppressive policies and practices (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001). CRT thus provides a framework and a lens through which YPAR practitioners can pose questions and analyze their data.

Defining YPAR as a Practice

Cammarota and Fine (2008) identify five main tenets of YPAR. First, the “researcher” is a collective. It may span generations and include many kinds of stakeholders (see the second tenet), but all members of the group are producing and using knowledge together for a common goal. Second, stakeholders are broadly defined, but at its core, the collective includes those with insider knowledge. The community being researched is the community conducting that research. Third, these stakeholders tend to use CRT, particularly the concept of intersectionality, in their theoretical framework to

aid in their investigation of oppression and power. Fourth, “the knowledge gained from the research should be critical in nature” (p. 6). In other words, the research should produce a deeper understanding of the systemic power dynamics affecting the issue under investigation. Finally, that critical knowledge gained is meant to be used for *action* and social change. Cammarota and Fine (2008) assert that “through participatory action research, youth learn how to study problems and find solutions to them. More importantly, they study problems and derive solutions to obstacles preventing their own well-being and progress” (p. 6). Connor and Zaino (2014) further elaborate on the goals of such youth organizing, stating that “it offers an expanded view of youth’s capacity and agency, suggests fresh approaches to political organizing, and highlights the importance of involving youths in educational reform” (p. 174). Thus, YPAR has implications both as a methodological approach to research and as a critical pedagogy.

YPAR as a research methodology. Akom, Ginwright, and Cammarota (2008) define YPAR as “research methodology in which young people study their own social contexts to understand how to improve conditions and bring about greater equity” (p. 4). Moreover, Fine (2008) asserts that participatory action research (PAR) is a “radical epistemological challenge” (p. 215) to traditional research and scholarship methods in that its practitioners understand knowledge as a collective process in which expertise is widely distributed and the knowledge of those most oppressed is especially valuable and revealing. As such, YPAR practitioners, grounded in critical youth studies and CRT, not only make space for marginalized voices, they center them. Additionally, youth in YPAR are seen as “legitimate and essential collaborators” (Morrell, 2008, p. 158). Morrell

asserts that this shift in understanding of youth and their potential is fundamental to any program truly seeking to address the opportunity gaps and barriers to effective education for marginalized youth. In other words, it understands youth as active producers and users of knowledge and participants in democratic processes, not as passive recipients or worse, as threats to democracy and knowledge.

YPAR as a critical pedagogy. As Cammarota and Fine (2008) describe, what separates YPAR from other brands of research is that it is not only a methodology and epistemology, but also a pedagogy. Through YPAR,

students study their social contexts through research and apply their knowledge to discover the contingent qualities of life. Thus, the important lesson obtained from engaging in this pedagogical praxis is that life, or more specifically the students' experiences, are not transcendental or predetermined. Rather, praxis reveals how life experiences are malleable and subject to change, and the students possess the agency to produce changes. (p. 6)

Thus, the learning in YPAR is threefold: students learn about the issue being studied (knowledge), they learn *how* to research and present information on that issue (skills for acquiring knowledge), and they cultivate their personal and collective agency (dispositions). Moreover, according to Cannella (2008), the learning in YPAR is partially about unlearning. "Through affirmation that they have intellectual insight and perception, they unlearn to suppress their intellectual identities. They unlearn to just reconcile themselves to reality because there is nothing they can do" (p. 191).

The action element in YPAR is central to its mission as a critical pedagogy. Cahill, Rios-Moore, and Threatts (2008) state that throughout a YPAR project, one must consider action as the ultimate goal, and thus it is "critical to address both the purpose of

doing research and the intended audiences,” always asking “What do we hope to accomplish with our research? Who should we ‘speak to’?” (p. 116). This action may be concrete, for example, taking the form of a policy brief, informational website, sticker campaign, performance, protest, rally, or other event or document. But the ultimate goal of YPAR is not to complete the action and move on. It is rather to agitate the hearts and minds of participants so that action and transformation are on-going. In describing their action goals for YPAR, researchers emphasize that youth begin “seeing with different eyes” (Cahill et al., 2008, p. 115) or envisioning an “imagined but possible future” (Cannella, 2008, p. 205). In other words, YPAR practitioners understand that social justice is not a goal to be achieved overnight nor as the result of a single project or action. Action is not bounded within the project, but instead is meant to manifest through it, in each participant, in on-going and myriad ways.

Agency, which Kinchloe (2004) describes as students’ ability to “shape and control their own lives” (p.), is thus the overarching goal of YPAR, and agency for marginalized youth is especially centered. Given the centrality of marginalized youth’s voices, experiences, and agency, YPAR is an appealing intervention strategy for minoritized youth for educators seeking a critical approach to such intervention. YPAR can successfully help youth who would traditionally be positioned as “at-risk” speak back to that very label and simultaneously find avenues for success academically, civically, and economically (Morrell, 2008; Romero et al., 2008). Research studies on YPAR have demonstrated its potential for promoting student empowerment (Kohfeldt, Chhun, Grace, & Langhout, 2011; Langhout, Collins, Ellison, 2013), autonomy (Ozer & Wright, 2012),

and politicized voice (Nygreen, 2010). But because YPAR deeply challenges the status quo, finding a place for it within institutions can be difficult (Kohfeldt et al., 2011).

Situating this Study—Policies, the District-level Initiative, and the School

Service-learning and YPAR are both pedagogical techniques that link youth learning to real-world, community-centered experiences. Service-learning, in particular, has increased in popularity over the last decades, finding institutional support in both the K-12 schools and the university and in policy at the federal, state, and local level. Paul County Schools' initiative is one of many around the country, as shown in a google search of "service-learning in public schools" which yields thousands of hits for district program guidelines from across the country. Six states allow individual districts to make service-learning a graduation requirement, Maryland currently requires service-learning for graduation, and the District of Columbia has a community service graduation requirement (Education Commission of the States, 2014). Congress currently has a bill in the House which would create a national center for K-12 service-learning and award competitive grants to states and districts who implement "the service-learning model to strengthen the content area disciplines and implement key educational innovations in schools with a high percentage of underperforming youth" (H.R. 2268, 2013).

The Paul County Service-Learning Initiative. The Paul County Character Development Initiative and its service-learning component are part of the district's Strategic Plan "to nurture students who will excel academically while developing strong moral character" (PCS Service-Learning Handbook, 2014, p. 1). The program has been implemented district-wide and awarded approximately 760 service-learning diplomas and

awards in 2013. The minimum amount of time required to earn an award is 100 hours; thus, given the total number of Paul County 2013 graduates, roughly 15% of the 2013 graduating class had participated in at least 100 hours of service-learning work during their four years of high school (PCS Press Release, 2013). Demographic data on the students receiving the awards and diplomas is not publically available, nor is the program specifically conceived as an intervention strategy for “at-risk” youth. However, its director has received an award honoring service work in “urban” schools from the National Youth Leadership Council which states in its press release (2014) that:

As a large, diverse school district, Paul County Schools has increased its graduation rate 9% over the past six years. In the past three years, the number of low-performing schools has fallen, and the number of high-performing schools has nearly doubled. Most importantly, students are being empowered to engage as leaders in their own education.

Given the focus in this statement on increasing graduation rates and converting low-performing to high-performing schools, alongside the allusions to “urban” and “diverse” which may be code words for “at-risk” (which is often itself a code word for “Black and Brown”), one can assume that service-learning is to some extent, seen in the district as an intervention for these youth.

Paul County has adopted the following operational definition of service-learning.

Service-learning in our district is:

A way of teaching and learning that connects positive and meaningful action in the community with academic learning, personal growth and civic responsibility. Service-Learning helps develop citizenship and good character while providing direct connections to the academic curriculum. (PCS Service-Learning Handbook, 2014, p. 3)

In addition to this operational definition, according to the Handbook, the service-learning projects are to be youth-driven and make clear space for “youth voice” (p. 8), encourage the “analysis of different points of view...and develop interpersonal skills” (p. 8), and focus on solving problems identified and studied by the youth in their own communities. As these mandates meshed directly with the commitments of YPAR, there was space for a YPAR-guided service-learning project within the district’s service-learning initiative.

Gordon High School and the Spanish for Native Speakers II course. My research site for this YPAR-guided service-learning project was a Spanish for Native Speakers II class at Gordon High School (GHS). This school is located in a rural portion of an otherwise urban and suburban school district in North Carolina. According to the NC School Report Card data for GHS, the school enrolled 1163 students in grades 9-12 and exceeded its “growth expectations” for 2014, as measured by graduation rates and standardized test scores. GHS’s overall graduation rate (the percentage of students who graduate in four years or less) was 80.3%, slightly lower than state and district averages. The graduation rate for “Hispanic” students was slightly below the school average at 79%, although the graduation rate for Limited English Proficiency students was actually quite high at 90%. The NC School Report Card data for GHS also reported the school as having a slightly higher crime rate than the district and state averages, with 1.27 “acts of crime” per 100 students. And while they reported lower rates of short-term suspensions than district and state averages, their rate of long-term suspension is higher than the district average and equivalent to the state average. Also of note, the NC School Report Card data for GHS reported that 59% of the graduating class enrolled in some form of

higher education, much lower than the district average of 72% and the state average of 67%.

According to the demographic data about GHS included in their US News and World Report profile, the study body was 68% non-White, with 10% of the students identified as “Hispanic.” No specific data was available regarding the number of students whose home language is Spanish, but the school, unlike many in its district, offers a two-course sequence of “Spanish for Native Speakers” that these students may take to fulfill their World Language requirement, indicating that their presence is significant enough to meet course offering enrollment requirements. According to the NC World Language Essential Standards (2013), the purpose of these Native Speakers classes is to help students develop their heritage literacy skills so as to

become knowledgeable global citizens with the skills to be multilingual and multi-literate in a way that honors their need to simultaneously identify and communicate with their heritage, home, or immersion culture(s) and the mainstream culture(s) in which they live and work. (p. 9)

Our YPAR-guided Service-Learning Project

Mrs. Brandon, the Spanish for Native Speakers II classroom teacher, agreed to partner with me for this course-long YPAR-guided service-learning project as a way of extending social justice themes throughout the course’s standard curriculum. We divided the YPAR-guided service-learning project into five phases: consciousness-raising and problem-posing, research design and data collection, data analysis, action, and summative reflection. While I was the primary facilitator of the project-specific work, the teacher and I also embedded the issues investigated during the first phase into collaboratively

designed presentational, interpersonal, and interpretive activities that supported the students' acquisition/practice of vocabulary and grammar skills. Thus, social justice themes become the vehicle through which students studied the language. Moreover, because we built these activities based on their problem-posing, the students also had a voice in the direction of their learning. The YPAR-guided service-learning project was thereby fully embedded into the classroom practice and curriculum of this core class.

YPAR informed our service-learning project epistemologically, theoretically, and operationally. We took seriously the notion that our knowledge production and use was collective, lateral, and relationship-focused. In this way, we honored the kind of learning privileged in a critical service-learning paradigm. I used critical youth studies, critical pedagogy, and CRT to guide our relationships, how we looked at the issues we studied, how we positioned ourselves, and how we used our knowledge in the world. We centered marginalized voices, particularly youth voices, and engaged with issues on social and political (rather than solely individual) levels. We were self-reflective. We practiced agency and in doing so, acted to make our worlds more just places. Operationally, we used action research methods throughout our project to gather, share, and construct knowledge (both content and critical). Through these research methods, we both practiced curricular academic skills and cultivated our agency. In essence, YPAR provided the framework for how we attended to the service-learning process.

But while this project embraced a YPAR framework, it was still also a service-learning project. YPAR does not inherently involve "service" in the common service-learning sense, but it does require action. In this project, we conceived of our YPAR-

inspired action, and our research itself (in that we used it to try and change the policies and systems under study), as “service” to our community. While we sometimes had to get creative, we were able to adhere to all of the district’s guidelines for service-learning while staying true to the tenets of YPAR.

As a service-learning project operating in an institutional framework, one goal of our project was set for us—we were required to “develop citizenship and good character while providing direct connections to the academic curriculum” (PCS Service-Learning Handbook, 2014, p. 3). But influenced by critical service-learning and YPAR, we worked towards these goals through the asset-oriented cultivation of critical agency. We conceived of critical agency as a trait of “good character” and as a citizenship skill. Developing and using this critical agency required us to practice and acquire skills and knowledges that connected to the academic curriculum. Thus, we attended to the stated goals for Paul County service-learning while maintaining a critical, social justice-oriented theoretical framework.

Significance

This study puts into conversation two fields of research—YPAR and (critical) service-learning. A search of ERIC only returns one study that explicitly combines YPAR and service-learning (Schensul & Berg, 2004), and these researchers were anthropologists, not educators; and their decade-old study involved urban African-American students and occurred in a community organization separate from the school. As educational practices, I believe that YPAR and service-learning can reinforce one another. YPAR’s explicitly critical goals may make its use in the public schools tricky,

but institutional support for service-learning could facilitate its entry in a combined project. Institutionalized service-learning, as previously described, is often minimally critical and can reinforce deficit ideologies, while critical service-learning, focusing on consciousness-raising and political agency may be more difficult to merge with institutionalized service-learning and curricular goals. YPAR can provide some helpful structure and a process-orientation to critical service-learning work. Additionally, YPAR can critique service-learning by fundamentally questioning the social hierarchies and whiteness that run through many attempts at service-learning, critical and otherwise. Thus, by placing YPAR and (critical) service-learning in conversation with each other, this project explored the possibilities in each construction to reinforce the other towards the ultimate goal of education for social justice.

Additionally, most YPAR projects, even those that relate to education or take place in schools, do not occur within core classes (part of the existing course catalog and required for graduation) as part of coursework. They may be extracurricular and school-sponsored, like Van Sluys's "Chicago Parent Project" (2010) or Ozer and Wright's work (2012), or they may be extracurricular and the result of university-community partnerships (i.e., not school-sponsored), like the Council for Youth Research program (Morrell, 2008) or the Youth Arts Researchers project (Ardoin, Castrechini, & Hofstedt, 2013). When they are embedded in coursework, the courses would not be considered "core". For example, Irizzary's (2011) YPAR work did occur within a two-year course sequence in a high school, but those courses were electives specifically designed to house the YPAR project. They may have counted towards the credits students needed for

graduation, but they were not content-area, required courses. Nor were they cataloged courses; presumably because of standing university-school partnerships, Irizzary was allowed to create new courses outside of the existing course of study. This distinction is not meant to diminish the work done in those courses as it was exemplary and valuable, but to point out the uniqueness of that situation. Similarly, Tucson Unified School District's highly successful, though ultimately eliminated Social Justice Education Project (Romero et al., 2008), although housed within required core US History and US Government courses, was itself a broader and unique program that sought to center Latin@ perspectives and experiences, while providing students of all ethnicities, but many Latino@s, a space from which to critique and speak back to the systems that impeded their chances for academic and economic success. Additionally, critiques and cautions regarding "institutionalizing" YPAR abound. Our work demonstrated that while it was counter-cultural to conduct YPAR within a public school classroom, it was possible to authentically do so. Thus, given the many critiques of "institutionalized" YPAR and the scarcity of research on YPAR conducted as part of a core academic course within a public school setting, our work offers the field some insight into the process, benefits, and challenges of such an implementation.

Moreover, because institutional service-learning rarely address students' critical agency, our experiences with this project offer insights into its possibility for such use. And while YPAR literature does address critical agency more explicitly, it often asserts that it cannot be authentically fostered during projects conducted within classroom or school settings due to structural barriers. With this dissertation, I intend to push the

research forward in both the YPAR and service-learning fields by exploring how and why YPAR and service-learning could be blended, how marginalized students' senses of critical agency were affected by such a project, and the implications of such a practice as an "intervention" strategy for youth positioned by their school as "at-risk."

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this project, I studied how marginalized youth experienced critical agency throughout a YPAR-guided service-learning project that was fully embedded into their core course curriculum. In order to provide additional context and foundation for my study, I have reviewed several bodies of literature. First, I reviewed the literature on agency as a concept in order to clarify what I would look for as I collected and analyzed my data on students' experiences with it. I then reviewed prior studies on service-learning and YPAR projects that commented on agency as a goal or result of these projects in order to situate my study within this existing research. I looked at how the extant literature addressed critical agency for "at-risk" or marginalized youth and marginalized youth in service-learning in order to further explain how my study may contribute to this conversation. Finally, I examined the literature on YPAR conducted within institutional settings to better understand the challenges and benefits of such an implementation.

Defining Youth Agency

As youth agency was the focal point of this project, I must define what agency is and how it may be expressed and cultivated. From a social psychological perspective, Bandura (2001) describes human agency as intentional action, completed with forethought by a human who is motivated to complete the action and self-regulative and self-reflective in that completion. In other words, agency is not blind or thoughtless

action; it is considered action that takes into account the agent's skills, knowledge, morals, and goals. Such agency is a central tenet of YPAR, critical pedagogy, and critical youth studies, but neoliberal and deficit-based reform efforts also address agency, though they frame it differently. Often considered a character development goal, personal agency, in which the focus is on an individual's actions, is the most common understanding of agency in the service-learning literature. This individualized understanding of agency fits a neoliberal ideal, as does its inclusion in character education.

Character education in general and for "at-risk" youth often takes on a deficit flavor, the implication being that the students lack these traits (which are required for success) and must be taught them through a remediation program. Couched in the language of "personal responsibility," agency here is seen as motivation, a competitive drive, and the ability/desire to take care of one's self. This kind of agency is juxtaposed against the culture of poverty or social disorganization thesis—it is something that must be acquired in order to overcome the deficiencies of one's upbringing or environment and access the dominant culture.

Comparatively, within a critical framework, personal agency is seen not just as a means for self-improvement, though it is that too. It is also the way to "perceive the human machinations behind these [social] constructions and thus encourage re-creative actions to produce realities better suited to meet [youth] needs and interests" (Cammarota & Fine, 2008, p. 7). In other words, agency is not just about changing oneself to be more responsible (in a neoliberal framework read: not a burden to society). It is more than

simply completing a considered action. Rather, it is about higher-order change—affecting systems, structures, and institutions and speaking back to power. Cahill et al. (2008) assert that this is the kind of agency central to a democracy. This expanded notion of agency is what I will call critical agency, as it connects the notion of personal agency as one's considered action with the critical discovery and transformation of systems of power, privilege, and oppression.

Though most commonly thought of at the personal level, Bandura's (2000) social psychological framework for human agency includes a collective mode (p. 13). Collective agency is similar to personal agency, but rather than focus on individual action, the focus is on a group's communal ability to act successfully. Bandura (2000) describes this agency as "the product not only of the shared intentions, knowledge, and skills of its members, but also of the interactive, coordinated, and synergistic dynamics of their transactions" (p. 14). In other words, collective agency is not simply about a sum of parts, it is also about the inter-workings of those parts to produce a whole greater than their sum.

Critical researchers value collective agency equally with personal agency. As Connor and Zaino (2014) state, youth organizing projects are about building "the collective capacity of youths to challenge and transform the institutions in their community" (pp. 174-175). Not only do such projects seek to foster in each student a sense of him or herself as change agent, but also to empower them as a unit and demonstrate the importance of cooperation and solidarity in bringing about change. Other

YPAR scholars similarly assert collective agency as a central to the YPAR process (Akom et al., 2008; Cannella, 2008; Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001).

Connected to critical agency in its personal and collective manifestations are the concepts of efficacy, resistance, empowerment, and autonomy. In the following sections I elaborate on each of these related concepts. Taken together, these concepts informed my understanding of how students experienced critical agency and how I designed our YPAR-infused service-learning project to best support their development of it.

Agency and Efficacy

Bandura (2000) positions self-efficacy as central to personal human agency because “it is partly on the basis of efficacy beliefs that people choose what challenges to undertake, how much effort to expend in the endeavor, how long to persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, and whether failures are motivating or demoralizing” (p. 10). In earlier work, Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as a belief that one has the ability to “successfully execute the behavior required to produce” certain outcomes (p. 193). In other words, agency is the considered action and efficacy is the belief in one’s ability necessary to complete that action or even attempt it in the first place. O’Donoghue (2006) uses the term public efficacy to describe the kind of efficacy that would foster critical agency. She describes public efficacy as “the extent to which young people see themselves as capable of affecting or influencing both the [youth organization] and the broader community” (p. 232).

Because efficacy can be understood as a causal factor in determining agency, both personal and collective, any project seeking to foster agency must also attend specifically

to efficacy. Bandura (1977) provides a theory regarding the source of people's efficacy expectations. He states that these expectations come from four sources: performance accomplishments (succeed once, feel like you can succeed again), vicarious experience (feeling like you can succeed after having seen someone else do it), verbal persuasion ("pep" talks and peer pressures to overcome past failures), and emotional arousal (the amount of fear or discomfort that we associate with our ability to accomplish certain tasks). In his research, he has found that the first two have the greatest impact. While each source is relevant in the YPAR or service-learning context, the action learning environment fostered in such projects, including ours, specifically lends itself to performance accomplishments and vicarious experiences. Guided by critical youth studies, I understood students as intrinsically capable and valuable and genuinely wanted and expected each participant to contribute, act, learn, and experience success. Pedagogically, our project included scaffolding and support processes that gave students chances to succeed themselves and to celebrate others' successes.

Agency and Resistance

Resistance is another concept intertwined with critical agency. While not part of a neoliberal or deficit-based understanding of agency, resistance is central to a critical agency that seeks not only self-serving agency but also social justice-oriented collective and political agency. Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) theorize that there are three types of resistance for marginalized communities. The first is "self-defeating" resistance, exemplified in an educational context by youth who reject the system rather than let it change them or try to change it. Dropping out of school, for example, may be a self-

defeating form of resistance for youth who are marginalized by schooling. They resist the system, but in doing so, limit their own life chances. The second form of resistance is “conformist.” Youth resist the ideology of the school internally or privately while also conforming to its will in order to reap its benefits. The third form of resistance is “transformational,” a conscious and social justice-oriented form of resistance that challenges the system and prompts youth to seek actions that foster social and political change. This type of resistance relates directly to the notion of critical agency. If critical agency is the considered, change-seeking action, then transformative resistance is a catalyst for critical agency.

Agency and Empowerment

Also entwined with critical agency is the notion of empowerment. Kohfeldt et al. (2011) define empowerment as “a relational, non-linear process that expands people’s control over access to the resources that affect them” (p. 28). They assert that empowerment is essential for systemic change and that youth in particular are usually denied empowerment all together or have it mediated and defined for them by adults. They describe the three keys to developing authentic empowerment in school settings: “non-tokenized youth participation in decision making, a focus on facilitating critical consciousness through unearthing root causes of social problems, and socially just social action informed by critical reflection” (p. 29). In terms of critical agency, empowerment could be understood as the space, access, and tools needed for one to exercise it. Langhout et al. (2013) further describe how empowerment can be fostered, stating that because power is inherently relational, empowerment can only happen through

relationships. They describe five factors of this relational empowerment: “collaborative competence, bridging social divisions, facilitating others’ empowerment, mobilizing networks, and passing on a legacy” (n.p.). Through this relational empowerment we make spaces, grant or take the access, and develop the tools needed for critical agency. In line with critical agency’s focus on higher-order, systemic change, and transformative resistance, Kohfeldt, et al. further describe empowerment as the will and ability to take transformative action in and for one’s community.

Agency and Autonomy

Autonomy is also related to the idea of critical agency. Freire (2008) describes autonomy as “a process of becoming oneself, of maturing, of coming to be” (p. 98) that is directly connected to a person’s decision-making practice. We mature in our capacity to control ourselves and our environments (our autonomy) by practicing the very thing that indicates that we have autonomy (our decision-making). He insists that “it is in making decisions that we learn to decide” (p. 97) and thus that a pedagogy of autonomy must be “centered on experiences that stimulate decision making and responsibility” (p. 98).

Autonomy, this ability to make responsible decisions, is required for agency. In order to be able to take considered, change-seeking actions, one must have a developed sense of autonomy. Moreover, the sense of responsibility that Freire ties to autonomy can be connected to the “critical” in critical agency—the ability to take considered, change-seeking action *in and for* the world. Autonomy for Freire is not individualism run amok, it is personal freedom couched in collective responsibility. The autonomous decision-

making is not completely self-serving, it is about acting in ways that better one's own life chances, but also taking responsibility for the impact of those actions on others.

Agency and Service-Learning

Because critical service-learning is heavily influenced by critical pedagogy and its emphasis on consciousness-raising and transformation, scholars working from that paradigm often theorize about critical agency (Mitchell, 2008). However, empirical research that centers agency is rare. I have located one empirical study that specifically assesses agency as a learning outcome in critical service-learning.

Conley and Hamlin (2009) examine how a service-learning project in a Leadership for Social Justice seminar course impacted five female, low-income, first generation college students of color. Using interviews, classwork artifacts, focus groups, and surveys, the researchers conducted a thematic analysis within and across cases (each student) to determine both how the individual students experienced agency over time and what patterns could be found among those experiences. They conclude that all five students enhanced their senses of agency, as defined by increases in self-efficacy habits and an expressed sense that they could be successful in college. Moreover, the study indicates an increase in *critical* agency, as the researchers report that all participants indicated that they would continue to work for the “common good”...with an enhanced sense of efficacy and a more nuanced understanding of the need for systemic change” (p. 56). Throughout their research, they frame service-learning as a potential intervention strategy for “at-risk” students, although their location in higher education means that attention is paid to first-generation student attrition as opposed to the “achievement gap.”

Outside of the critical service-learning community of scholars and practitioners, studies that specifically refer to agency as a goal or result of service-learning are not common in the literature, perhaps because many service-learning constructions stop short of inviting critical agency in their participants. Because they are not operating from critical perspectives, when they conceive of agency, they frame it in terms of self-efficacy, autonomy, self-management, or responsibility. All of these ideas relate to agency as individual, change-seeking action, but they limit that action to self-improvement or “helping” others (i.e. the personal or interpersonal level). They do not encourage sociopolitical or systemic change, but keep agency in the individual realm privileged in a neoliberal framework.

As an example of a study that addresses this individualistic notion of agency, in their large-scale experimental study, Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier (2000) examine the effects of service-learning on middle grade students’ social responsibility and academic success. The researchers understand “social responsibility” in terms of concern for others, feeling a duty to help, and perceived efficacy in doing so. While their notion of social responsibility stops short of critical agency, their measure does address efficacy, which is a precursor for agency of all types, though they still conceive of it terms of individualized “helping” behaviors. Their “academic success” measure also incorporates elements of agency, if not critical agency, as they evaluate students’ “commitment to classwork, school engagement, perceived scholastic competence, [and] intellectual achievement responsibility” (p. 337). While engagement, commitment, and responsibility again may not be directly related to the notion of critical agency, it reflects

the general understanding of agency within the research. Using various research-verified quantitative survey instruments, their results indicate that service-learning, especially long-term service-learning does positively impact students in each measure as compared to their non-participating peers.

Eyler and Giles (1999), in their compilation of research on the “learning” in service-learning, use the terms “agency” and “efficacy” interchangeably. Because they work from a more traditional framework, they consider both agency and efficacy in terms of the personal, describing them as the “feeling that what you do can make a difference” (p. 38). More in line with Bandura’s notion of efficacy than agency, they posit that this “feeling” is a predictor of active citizenship and the ability to persevere. They also note that service-learning can significantly increase this agency/efficacy because it provides students with the chance and space to act meaningfully on real problems.

Berkas (1997) specifically mentions agency in his program evaluations of K-12 service-learning, indicating that students report increased awareness of community needs, feelings of agency, and ability to affect change in their community. Yates and Youniss (1999) also specifically mention agency in their case study examining civic engagement in youth as they move into young adulthood. Analyzing participants’ essays during and three, five, and ten years after their in-school, eleventh grade service-learning experience, Yates and Youniss conclude that service-learning in high school can foster agency in youth as they move into adulthood. Both of these studies approximate critical agency, in that they understand agency to be of use in affecting community change or civic engagement, but neither specifically indicates that this engagement or change affects

systems and structures. In other words, they may still assume social agency in the individualized sense of “helping.”

Other research studies focus specifically on efficacy, and I have yet to locate a study that does not indicate that service-learning enhances self-efficacy. For example, in their quantitative study of service-learning’s impact on college students’ self-efficacy, Simons and Cleary (2006) find that scores on self-efficacy measures are improved as a result of service-learning experiences. Similarly, Waldstein and Reiher (2001) analyze data collected using research-verified survey instruments to examine service-learning’s impact on ninth grade students’ academic, personal, and social development. With regards to self-efficacy, they find that more service-learning correlates with higher scores on self-efficacy measures, though they do not define self-efficacy beyond noting that one item on the self-efficacy scale asks students the extent to which they agree that “Planning ahead makes things turn out better” (p. 9).

In her experimental study of self-efficacy and service-learning for elementary school students, Arrington (2010) uses interview data and conducts regression analyses and independent sample t-tests on data collected using Bandura’s “Children’s Self-Efficacy Scale.” She finds that students participating in service-learning greatly improve their self-efficacy skills compared to non-participating peers. In her study, however, she specifically examines self-efficacy in terms of self-regulated learning, consistent with the common relation of efficacy and agency to self-management as opposed to transformation.

Terry and Panter (2011) study student efficacy as a result of service-learning and participatory research. Using an action research methodology and analyzing their students' research, conversations, and reflections throughout the project, Terry and Panter conclude that students enhanced their self-efficacy in addition to improving their academic learning outcomes for the unit content. While the understanding of efficacy they use is general and not related specifically to transformation or to one's belief in a capacity to affect higher-order change, the project does privilege action in the service-learning construction (as opposed to exploration of the other or volunteering/charity), indicating that the kind of efficacy they find may be more critical in nature. Their study, however, focuses on suburban, predominantly white students identified as "gifted" and participating in an alternative arts-based curriculum program, which may limit its applicability to other projects and other demographics.

Thus, while multiple empirical studies focus on self-efficacy and a few mention an individualized version of agency, there is a paucity of research specifically examining critical agency in the service-learning literature. Given this gap, Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) typology of citizen may offer an additional route to examining critical agency via service-learning. In their often-cited, two-year study of K-12 programs seeking to educate for democracy, they define three types of citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. Using the example of a canned food drive, they explain "personally responsible" citizens as those who would simply donate food, while "participatory" citizens would recognize a surface condition (hunger) and organize a way ameliorate it (food drive). "Justice-oriented" citizens would additionally focus on

“critically assessing the social, political, and economic circumstances surrounding the surface conditions” (p. 48). In other words, they would not just address the condition; they would ask why hunger exists and look for structural ways to address the bigger social issue of hunger. Students engaging at any level of citizenship might express a sense of self-efficacy. Even those simply donating food might feel like they are making a difference. Agency, understood as individual, change-seeking action, might be supported at the participatory level. But critical agency requires students to engage at the highest level of citizenship because only as a “justice-oriented” citizen does a student begin to take considered, change-seeking actions that have higher-order consequences.

Ponder, Vander Veldt, and Lewis-Ferrell (2011) apply Westheimer and Kahne’s principles of citizenship to the goals of service-learning, using the three categories of citizenship as a way to assess the success of the service-learning projects. Over two years, the researchers collected data on service-learning projects implemented by an elementary school teacher/graduate student who had participated in graduate coursework on using service-learning for civic education. They used a constant comparison technique to analyze interviews, observations field notes, and teacher reflections for where in Westheimer and Kahne’s typology the students’ experiences fell. Their findings indicate that students can engage with service-learning as participatory and justice-oriented citizens, which may also indicate that service-learning can foster agency and potentially critical agency.

In sum, the research on efficacy and agency, critical and otherwise, suggests that service-learning does have the potential to support students’ development of these senses

and skills. Because it offers students opportunities to engage in actively solving meaningful problems, service-learning may help students increase their confidence in their ability to problem-solve and equip them with the skills and knowledges needed to do so. When paired with critical consciousness-raising and reflection activities that encourage students to look at problems on both personal *and* structural levels, service-learning may also have the potential to support critical agency. However, research specifically focused on *critical* agency or the related concepts of resistance and empowerment is scarce in service-learning literature. Bringing YPAR into the conversation may help address this gap. In the next section I examine the literature on agency, resistance, and empowerment in YPAR.

Agency and YPAR

While service-learning may shy away from directly addressing agency, resistance, and empowerment, YPAR centers them. However, YPAR conducted within schools must contend with institutional constraints that may limit students' opportunities for truly exercising their critical agency. Kohfeldt et al. (2011) address both the potential of YPAR for developing empowerment and agency in students and the tensions that arise in the process. They state that because of YPAR's theoretical framework and democratization of knowledge and process, it is readily positioned to promote critical agency. But as Ozer, Ritterman, and Wanis (2010) assert, YPAR is "clearly counter-cultural insofar as it is fundamentally about student-led inquiry, the valuing of students' concerns and expertise, and the opening up of opportunities for students to take on tasks and roles that involve self-regulation as well as participation in governance" (p. 152). This counter-

cultural bend is both what opens up the potential for practicing critical agency in YPAR and the source of its institutional difficulties.

In Phillips, Berg, Rodriguez, and Morgan's (2010) multi-year interview and observation-based qualitative study of the implementation and sustainability of YPAR in a middle school drop-out prevention program, they find that these institutional constraints were too much to overcome. Testing pressures, lack of adult buy-in to YPAR's youth-led dictate, adult hesitancy to allow discussions of racism and other politically-charged issues, and concerns over "losing control" of their classrooms resulted in a YPAR experience that did not provide students with real opportunities to practice critical agency.

Other studies of school-based YPAR report opposite findings. For example, Langhout et al.'s (2013) mixed-methods study examines students' critical agency development throughout a school-sanctioned after-school YPAR project with elementary-age students who are positioned as "at-risk" based on their SES and English language proficiency. The goal of the project was to engage students as decision-makers and change-agents in their school community through a YPAR project designed to help them problem pose and problem solve in ways that led to second-order (systemic/structural) change. The researchers discuss agency in terms of empowerment. In analyzing their observation notes and students' dialogue, they conclude that, in particular, students experience the collaborative competency element of empowerment at much higher rates in YPAR projects than in school in general. In other words, while tensions may exist and traditional power constructions may need attention, YPAR spaces within school still

provide opportunities for student empowerment and democratized youth-adult relationships that may not be found in other educational spaces. However, because their study was conducted on a YPAR project operating extra-curricularly, it may have naturally avoided some of the challenges that Phillips et al. (2010) noted.

Student comments collected by Ozer, Newlan, Douglas, and Hubbard (2013) reinforce Langhout et al.'s (2013) observation that YPAR, even constrained within an institution, creates spaces for fostering agency not found elsewhere in schools. Moreover, the students' comments indicate that the YPAR experience contributed to their critical, not just personal, agency by encouraging them to attempt second-order changes. As one student states: "you could actually make a difference...I'm not just helping myself, I'm helping the whole school" (p. 22). In their interviews and observations of 77 urban high school students engaged in class-based YPAR projects designed to build communication and teamwork skills while analyzing and acting to change school and community problems, the researchers conclude that the kind of empowerment students experienced in YPAR was active, not tokenistic or passive. In other words, the students were able to exert real power and make their own decisions; they were not led to certain decisions by adults or given false senses of control. Thus, even "bounded" empowerment, as they call the results of in-school YPAR in the title of their article, can positively impact students' senses of agency despite the institutional limitations that Kohfeldt et al. (2011) warn against.

Like Ozer et al. (2013) and Langhout et al. (2013), Ozer and Wright (2012) find that the YPAR experience they studied created spaces for students to exercise their

autonomy and for adults, and the students themselves, to positively change their perceptions of youth autonomy. In their five-year mixed methods study of YPAR's effect as an intervention strategy for urban youth, Ozer and Wright analyzed the project's impact on youth autonomy, meaning a person's capacity to make decisions and assert control over their environment. They specifically posit that while youth in secondary schools are developing in their autonomy, traditional educational settings and programs provide students with little opportunity to practice that autonomy or participate in decision-making. Furthermore, they assert that making space for these youth to exercise their autonomy is key to adolescent motivation. In connecting the notion of autonomy, which is essential for critical agency, to motivation, Ozer and Wright link YPAR back to more traditional notions of successful school "intervention." As students practice agency/autonomy/empowerment, they may find reasons to (re)engage with school and find ways to own their student identity without sacrificing their other identities (Van Sluys, 2010).

In sum, the research on YPAR demonstrates its potential to foster critical agency. Unlike service-learning, which rarely explicitly addresses critical agency, YPAR centers autonomy, empowerment, resistance, and agency but is less commonly adopted by mainstream educators. By blending YPAR with service-learning, our project created an institutionalized YPAR-guided service-learning experience for students that specifically focused on critical agency. Also unlike service-learning, YPAR specifically attends to critical agency for students who are positioned as "at-risk." Developing agency and (re)claiming a successful student identity (Van Sluys, 2010) is part of why YPAR has

been successful as an intervention strategy for minoritized youth when other deficit-based strategies have not. However, the literature also offers cautions for practioners working within institutional schooling as I continue to explore in the following section.

Critiques of YPAR within School Settings

As evidenced in the research on agency in YPAR, critiques and challenges of YPAR, particularly institutionalized YPAR, abound. Like Phillips et al. (2010), Kohfeld et al. (2011) state that traditional framings of children as dependent and recipient, the hierarchical control of bureaucracy in public education, and the history of colonization and assimilationist ideologies all pose challenges to youth empowerment and programs that seek to encourage it in an institutional setting.

Nygreen (2010), in examining politicized voice and whether her students made the shift from simply voicing their opinion on an issue to acting on that opinion, finds that students may have not have fully experienced agency during the compulsory YPAR project. Her findings indicate that YPAR conducted within institutional settings may limit students' transformative resistance because participants have difficulty overcoming the traditional constructs of teacher/student and coercion/liberation. In other words, because the work is mandatory and happening within the school, all parties have difficulty navigating "the apparent paradox between supporting student agency in all circumstances vs. 'forcing' students to do work" (p. 259). She posits that openly and actively discussing these tensions as part of the project's consciousness-raising may help adults and youth to critically question not only their social positioning and broader power dynamics, but also the power dynamics that exist within the group and the school environment.

Foster-Fishman, Law, Lichty, and Aoun (2010) also suggest that, as Berg et al. discovered, finding ways to effectively scaffold youth who have no training in research methods through problem-posing, project design, data collection, analysis, and representation without overrunning YPAR's youth-led directive can be problematic. They posit that often youth are engaged up through the data collection phase, but the analysis step is skipped, glossed over, or done by the adults. Failing to effectively scaffold youth through their own data analysis diminishes YPAR's critical pedagogical potential because "this analytic process requires individuals to critically examine assumptions and patterns underlying their data" (p. 75). To remedy this obstacle, they outline a method for engaging students in data analysis called ReACT and also suggest, similar to Phillips et al. (2010), that sufficient time be taken in the planning stage to prepare facilitators with practical methods for involving youth at all phases of the process.

Thus, in a classroom setting obstacles could include: a lack of student, teacher, parent and administrator buy-in; the ethics of student selection and participation (self-selecting, optional versus mandated, course requirement); resistance to challenging traditional hierarchical adult-youth roles; structural racism in the treatment of students of color and the deficit ideology of some privileged adults and students; how to offer appropriate amounts of scaffolding so that children with no previous research experience can successfully conduct research without overrunning the "youth-led" dictate of YPAR; pressure to teach in ways that directly positively impact test scores; and mandated curricular elements or teaching styles that do not mesh with the YPAR work. Ozer et al. (2010) additionally posit that large class sizes and/or inadequate space, adult supervision,

or time to work in smaller groups and the time and scheduling constraints of trying to work in a class period limit YPAR's feasibility as a classroom pedagogy.

Ozer et al. (2010) make suggestions for mitigating some of the above obstacles, presenting an analysis of characteristics of successful YPAR programs. They suggest that limiting the size of the participant group and engaging with them in private locations (unused office space, outside, empty classrooms, media centers, etc.) may positively impact student engagement as it increases their ability to both listen actively and be heard themselves. Additionally, they suggest that smaller school size and the pre-existence of adults disposed to care about and act on issues of school climate or even work with youth increases the chance of sustained YPAR that produces tangible results. These findings raise questions about the feasibility of YPAR as a general classroom pedagogy, given the current national trends towards larger class sizes and fewer additional adults in the schools. Their findings also indicate that while teachers may view YPAR techniques (like the popular Photovoice data collection method) as useful classroom tools for supporting cognitive development and student engagement, "the potential of PAR for increasing the participation of students in addressing concerns and improving the school [is often] either not understood or not a priority given limited resources and competing demands" (p. 164). Bertrand (2014) echoes this concern in her study of adult responses to youth engaged in YPAR. She warns that adults often hyper-focus on the academic benefits of YPAR and in doing so, miss the more critical point of the work and limit the students' empowerment and transformative resistance.

In addition to these practical and cultural concerns, ideological critiques like those Ozer et al. (2010) assert must be taken seriously. Because YPAR is critical and political by nature and frames intervention as empowerment instead of remediation or assimilation, it will face opposition from those operating from liberal individualist and deficit ideologies. As Romero et al. (2008) found in their ethnography of the Social Justice Education Project, their YPAR work and the larger program that housed it met significant resistance from educators and policy-makers not directly involved in the project. This political push-back to the social justice, Freireian-inspired pedagogy they used, which was accused of being racist, communist, and anti-American, eventually resulted in the program's cancellation (McGinnis & Palos, 2011).

Critical pedagogy is revolutionary. And YPAR is a critical pedagogy. Those truly engaging with YPAR, not just benignly borrowing its methods, are seeking to upset the status quo. This is a risky proposition, but one that perhaps cannot be compromised without losing the power and intent of YPAR. Thus, rather than find ways to soften the critique or obscure the political nature of the pedagogy, those engaging in YPAR should do so fully aware of the risks involved. Our inability, for personal, financial, social, or political reasons, to take on this risk may be the most potent obstacle to the inclusion of YPAR in schools.

Summary

As a social justice educator, I want to find the spaces in public schooling where marginalized students can speak and act for themselves in order to confront oppression. I believe that a YPAR framework for service-learning could help create these spaces. As

policy and research begins to push for service-learning as an intervention strategy for “at-risk” youth, this need for critical service-learning constructions that actively counter the deficit, neoliberal ideologies and address the experiences of marginalized students in asset-oriented ways becomes even more pressing. Moreover, research in the service-learning literature on agency, particularly critical agency, is limited. While scholars writing from critical frameworks have theorized about service-learning and critical agency, few have formally researched students’ experiences with it. Given this gap in the conversation, my study hopes to contribute a new perspective. As my project also employed YPAR techniques, I believe that it contributes to that conversation, as well, by taking seriously the suggestions and cautions other researchers have offered for institutional YPAR projects and analyzing how addressing those concerns impacted our outcomes. Looking for a way to give students a deeper sense of agency and to fundamentally shift the power dynamics of service-learning, I designed this YPAR-infused project to not only address these concerns for myself as a practitioner but as a contribution to the scholarly community, as well.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

In order to examine how students labeled by school staff as “at-risk” experience critical agency throughout their participation in a YPAR-infused service-learning project conducted as part of their high school coursework and comment on the process, benefits, and challenges of implementing such a project, I conducted an ethnographic study of that project. I considered this work ethnography for two main reasons. First, my study aimed to describe how students experienced critical agency within the cultural context of their school, the Spanish for Native Speakers II course, the district service-learning initiative, and our specific YPAR service-learning project. While I studied “how people interpret their experiences...and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23), which Merriam (2009) describes as indicative of a basic qualitative study, my aim was to analyze these experiences and interpretations through the lens of that culture of “schooling.” The students’ social positioning within that culture (including the “at-risk” label); the kinds of actions, relationships, and knowledges that were valued or allowed within that culture; and the students’ perceptions of that culture all informed my interpretation of how these students experienced critical agency during the study. This cultural lens positioned my study as ethnographic.

My role in the project and the length of interaction also led me to label the work ethnographic. I was an immersed participant throughout the project. I was with the class

once a week for its duration and additionally with certain groups of students outside of school hours during their service work. I was a co-researcher during the YPAR service-learning project, actively involved with the students during all phases of that work. I collected the majority of my data during those sessions. I had forty-five hours' worth of field notes/participant observation notes from my time in the class and working with the students on their action/service project. I also had 30 hours' worth of audio recordings from our weekly sessions and 45 journal entries and other work samples from each student. Finally, I had 90 minutes' worth of focus group data.

Because of the critical lens and the focus throughout the YPAR service-learning project on systemic change, I aligned my ethnography with postcritical ethnography, though due to practical and ethical constraints that I elaborate in the next section, it did not fully embody it. In the following section, I outline how I borrowed from postcritical ethnography in designing my study's methods and understanding my role as a researcher. Related to this contemplation on my role as a researcher, I address my positionality following my explanation of postcritical ethnography. I then attend specifically to my methods, addressing my procedures for data collection, analysis, and presentation.

Postcritical Ethnography

Postcritical ethnography has emerged as a response to concerns about critical ethnography, a methodology that itself emerged as a critique of traditional ethnographic methods which were considered "too atheoretical and neutral" by some critical researchers (Anderson, 1989, p. 294). While Noblit, Flores, and Murillo (2004) refrain from providing a concrete definition of critical ethnography, they describe it as a research

practice that is guided by the idea that “social life is constructed in contexts of power” (p. 4), has a political purpose, gives more authority to research subjects’ voice, and has emancipatory and socially transformative goals. Postcritical ethnographers maintain this general description, but offer additional methodological guidance, particularly related to reflexivity. This guidance comes in response to two main critiques of critical ethnography.

First, scholars question critical ethnographers’ tendency to hold critical theory as sacred, refusing to examine their own ideological practice as they examine others (Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004) and appealing to grand narratives in ways that may “substitute one form of hegemony for another” (Hyttén, 2004, p. 96). The postcritical ethnographers’ second major critique is that while critical ethnography promises transformation, that transformation often stays within the academy (Hyttén, 2004). In other words, Hyttén finds little evidence of tangible impacts in the lives of the participants resulting from critical ethnographies. She points to the first critique, critical ethnographers’ unquestioned adherence to critical theory and macro analysis, as one reason why material transformation may elude them. She also indicates that this privileging of researcher knowledge may impede the kinds of collaborative research that may more likely result in material change. To counter these tendencies, postcritical ethnographers must “give up the implicit assumption that they know how the world works and power operates, and the researched don’t” (Hyttén, 2004, p. 96) and engage with data on both the macro (structural) and micro (lived experiences) levels. Thus, they must expand their reflexivity

to include a troubling of their theoretical frameworks and how these lenses may serve to limit their analysis or their ability to use their findings for social change.

Drawing on these critiques, Hytten (2004) describes postcritical ethnography as a collaborative, dialogic, pedagogical, and transformative research process. The research subjects are meant to actively participate throughout the project. Findings must be shared and negotiated with the researched, though Hytten states that “this does not imply acquiescence to the researched, but that points of contention are described” (p. 104). These negotiated findings are then presented in accessible and multiple ways to multiple audiences, not simply to other scholars within the academy. It is partly through this accessible presentation of data that postcritical ethnography achieves its pedagogical and transformative functions. By attending to consciousness-raising (for the researcher *and* the researched) throughout the project and by presenting the work in ways that bring the findings to the community, the transformative impact of the research can extend beyond the theoretical and into the material. In other words, rather than situating “transformation” in the hope that readers of the findings will be inspired to make social changes (Hytten, 2004), postcritical ethnographers (and those they research) take concrete actions as a result of and possibly through the presentation of their findings (Gerstl-Pepin, 2004). Above all, postcritical ethnography is reflexive. Researchers not only pay attention to their positionality and the biases it creates, but they also reflect on their theoretical lenses and the assumptions that they bring to the research as critical scholars.

While I could not claim to be conducting a postcritical ethnography in its truest sense because my project was not collaborative at all stages, I did borrow from it as I designed my methods. As my theoretical framework was firmly critical, I took seriously the critiques of critical ethnography, and actively paid attention to the ways my critical lens may have been limiting what I allowed myself to see. I did not abandon it and retreat into a faux “neutrality,” but rather I stayed aware of it. I address this reflexivity in more detail in my trustworthiness section.

Also, while ultimately the ethnography’s design and the writing and defense of my dissertation was a solo project, I stayed as true to the collaborative and transformative spirit of postcritical ethnography as the institutional limit allowed. To do so, I built into my methods multiple spaces for collaboration with student participants. Although the students did not have any input in the research question, the design of these methods, the analysis techniques that I personally employed, or the writing and presentation of my dissertation, they did have the opportunity to help me generate codes and participant check my analyses.

I also took seriously what Anderson (1989) calls “informant empowerment” (p. 261), the notion that through research, participants should be respected as “subjects rather than objects of history” (p. 261) and that “with researcher support and facilitation, they are empowered to identify problems and collectively work toward solutions” (Hyttén, 2004, p. 102). This notion of empowerment supports the call for material transformation in postcritical ethnography. The YPAR phase of my research attended explicitly to material transformation as the students used their research skills and resulting actions to

try and improve both immediate conditions and alter the systems and policies that affected those conditions. Moreover, I am striving for material transformation as a result of this ethnography—to make a scholarly contribution that may indirectly inspire action but also result in concrete actions that lead to more socially-just educational practices.

Accessibly presented findings contribute to the possibility that research will result in material change (Hyttén, 2004). This dissertation may not be “accessible” in the ways that postcritical ethnographers mean since it is primarily intended for an audience within the academy. However, I have also presented my findings in workshop form at the state conference for World Language educators and shared teaching materials, processes, and advice on how to (and how *not* to) incorporate YPAR and service-learning into their classrooms and clubs with current and future teachers in various formal and informal capacities. I have also shared my findings in an abbreviated form with the service-learning coordinators for Paul County and the World Language curriculum facilitator, both of whom may be interested in how YPAR in service-learning could be used with students. Additionally, I have submitted work from this dissertation for consideration in several practitioner-oriented journals. Most directly, I hope that the teacher I partnered with and her colleagues who closely observed our work will use YPAR and service-learning in their future classes and Spanish clubs as a way to engage their students in social justice education.

In sum, my study adhered at least in part to each main tenet of postcritical ethnography. It was as collaborative as it could ethically and practically be given that this is my dissertation, and I was the one establishing the research question and methods and

ultimately the one responsible for the analysis and presentation of findings. It was pedagogical on two layers. Through the YPAR project, the students, their teacher, and I co-constructed knowledge about the issues the students chose to investigate.

Additionally, we co-constructed knowledge about critical agency and how the students experienced it. The actions that we took based upon these knowledges made the project transformative. I also attended specifically to my own positionality and a priori theoretical assumptions throughout the project in order to avoid the tendency of critical scholars to fit their data to their theory that Hytten (2004) and Noblit et al. (2004) warn against. In the following section I begin this explicit attention to my positionality by discussing how my race, heritage language, social privilege, and age/perceived authority impacted my work as a postcritical ethnographer on this project.

Positionality

Given that race and marginalization were salient throughout our project, I must pay attention to how my own race influenced my experiences as a service-learning and YPAR facilitator and Spanish teacher. I am a white, Anglo woman whose Spanish language skills were acquired through academic study in American public schools and private and public universities. I can claim no first-hand knowledge of oppression based on my own race, citizenship status, heritage language, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. I have spent my adult life teaching a language and culture that, while I deeply love and respect it, is not my own in any authentic way. While I have struggled more recently with how my position as a white, Anglo woman teaching Spanish language and culture may or may not represent colonization or appropriation, I fully acknowledge that it may have

presented a barrier to full and authentic engagement with the students at points during this project. I was always conscious of how my outsider status limited my ability to be fully one with my students. Instead, I positioned myself, not as one of them, but as an ally with them. In hindsight, however, my outsider status likely affected the kinds of stories they were willing to tell me (or in front of me), the level of trust I gained with them, and the access to their lives and communities that they granted me.

In addition to my social privilege, I was also constantly aware of my position as both a teacher and researcher in this construction. As a teacher, even if I was not their “official” teacher, I still entered our space with an implied level of authority and power over them. In order to foster the kind of lateral learning central to a critical service-learning and YPAR space, we had to actively attend to this power dynamic. We did so in concrete ways: I encouraged them to use my first name (they preferred not to); we sat in circles; we eliminated daily grades from the work they completed with me; we personally communicated about project tasks via text, phone, and email; and we tried to cultivate a relaxed atmosphere in which the students could be their authentic selves (e.g. we allowed them to listen to music while working, we did not punish cursing). Additionally, especially in their most racially-charged work, I emphasized that I was an ally, that I wanted to contribute what I knew and to learn what they knew, and that we would share decision-making power throughout our time together. In essence, I wanted them to see me as a resource, recognizing that I had certain skills and accesses that they did not, but also to understand that they had valuable contributions to make and that I was perhaps

more of a learner in that environment than they were. They were the insiders, after all, and I was the outsider.

My role as researcher was complicated by the fact that this project was a research project on a participatory action research project. In other words, while our service-learning YPAR project positioned me as a full co-researcher with the students, the postcritical ethnography that I also conducted *on* this service-learning YPAR project occasionally positioned me as the researcher and the students as my participants. I expected this dual role to be conflicting for me and for the students, who may have seen my desire to be an ally, resource, and partner in my role as their co-researcher in conflict with my other role as university researcher. I was aware of how their perception of me could influence the kinds of stories they told, the access I was granted, and the kind of trust I was able to build with them. While most of the time the students and I worked as collaborative co-researchers and they often shared with me powerful and potentially personally risky stories and ideas about their topics, there were moments in which they would remember that I was also researching *them* (when they would become re-aware of my voice recorder or when I would take some piece of work to photocopy, for example) and they would hesitate to tell me the story, make the comment, or hand me the work when moments before there was no reticence. I would reassure them that I was keeping things anonymous, that I would protect their work, but I know that there were things that went unshared because they remembered that I was going to be writing about them.

As a White, Anglo, socially privileged adult entering into a collaborative research project with minoritized youth, I was always cognizant of how my positionality

traditionally granted me authority over them. Both of my chosen methodologies—YPAR and postcritical ethnography—required that I challenge this traditionally granted authority and that I co-construct with students/co-researchers methods and spaces that encouraged collaboration. In the following section, I elaborate on the methods used for the both the YPAR-guided service-learning project and my postcritical ethnography of it.

Methods

My project was a layered research experience in which I not only engaged with students as co-researcher in a service-learning project guided by YPAR methods but also conducted my own ethnography of our experiences throughout the project. As such, this methods section elaborates on both components of the project. The participants were the same for both sections, so I discuss their characteristics and my selection procedure first. I also address how I gained access to and entered the site, which was also the same for both layers of the project. In the subsequent sections I outline the YPAR-guided service-learning project and the ethnography. In the YPAR section, I provide a timeline and a description of the goals and activities in each phase of the project. I will share specifics about the YPAR projects' research questions, data collection protocols, analyses, and presentation methods in the next chapter. Following the overview of the YPAR methods, I provide details regarding data collection, analysis, and presentation procedures for my ethnography of the project.

Participants

The primary participants in this project were thirteen high school sophomores and juniors enrolled in a Spanish for Native Speakers II course at Gordon High School, a public school in North Carolina. To be enrolled in such a course, students were identified

as being “heritage” Spanish learners, meaning they all had some proficiency with the Spanish language acquired through prolonged immersion. Course enrollment was the only participant criteria. All enrolled students were eligible. I will provide more details about each student participant in the data analysis chapters.

I invited all the students who would be in the class the following semester to participate in the study in person during one of their final sessions of Spanish for Native Speakers I in the first semester. At that time, I gave them a bilingual letter describing the project to take home and consider with their legal guardians. Once the spring semester began and students were actually attending the class in which I would work, I again visited to talk with them about the project and hand out another copy of the letter and the consent/assent forms. Sixteen students were enrolled in the course. Fourteen students initially enrolled as participants in my study. The students that chose to participate and whose parents also gave consent spent one class period a week with me moving through the YPAR service-learning project as outlined below. Students who chose not to participate worked on alternate assignments with the classroom teacher for the duration of the semester. One student did participate in our YPAR service-learning project but did not return her consent forms. As such, I did not collect data on her experience and have not included her in any of the data chapters. No students joined the project after it had begun.

Students were given the option, in accordance with Paul County informed consent procedures, to exit the research project at any time. Consequently, two students, after the principal stopped their group from pursuing their initial topic choice, chose to leave the

study and I stopped data collection on them. One student requested that I destroy her data and the other student gave me permission to use his. However, since he exited the study at its midpoint, I was unable to comment on his overall experience with critical agency and as such, did not create a narrative for him in the polyvocal analysis chapter, which I will describe momentarily. I did quote him in the other data chapters, as his comments both represented and influenced other students' ideas about the topics we explored.

The classroom teacher was also a participant in the project. She and I collaborated throughout the semester, as I will describe in more detail in the data chapters. Our interactions and her comments were included in my fieldnotes and in the classroom audio transcripts, and I have included her experiences in my data analysis, but I have not written a polyvocal narrative for her, as neither she nor I considered her a co-researcher in the YPAR project. While she facilitated the students' work by providing practical assistance and using their generated themes to support their Spanish language development, she did not work in partnership with them to generate those themes, design and implement their research work, or plan and execute their service actions.

Entering the Site

Following the protocol outlined by Paul County Schools for conducting research in their district, I first gained district-level approval and then made contact with the principal at the site to request her permission to work in her school. Once her permission was granted, I gained permission from the classroom teacher to conduct my project as part of her coursework. I then got informed consent from the teacher, the students, and their parents for their participation in the research project. Once consent was granted, I

attended two classes during which I got to know the students and their classroom dynamics prior to beginning the YPAR-guided service-learning project.

Outline of the YPAR-guided Service-Learning Project

The YPAR-guided service-learning project was divided into five phases. In the following section, I outline each phase, including its timeline, the purpose of the phase, and activities that were included. I provide additional details about the students' work in each phase in chapter four.

Phase one: Consciousness-raising and problem-posing (January-February). I called this phase "consciousness-raising," pulling from Freire's notion of *conscientizao* or the "process by which students, as empowered subjects, achieve a deepening awareness of the social realities which shape their lives and discover their own capacities to recreate them" (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2008, p. 14). Working towards this critical consciousness, I met weekly with the class for the duration of their class period. During these meetings, and in an effort to get to know one another better, we explored our identities and certain social, cultural, and political issues, and we examined our own roles in social systems. The first activity was to produce and share *autorretratos* (self-portraits). We read and discussed Rosario Castellanos' poem "Autorretrato" and discussed self-portraits by artists Pablo Neruda and Frida Kahlo. Students created and presented to the class their own self-portraits verbally, visually, and musically. I have incorporated their *autorretratos* into the polyvocal narratives.

In the subsequent sessions in this phase, the teacher and I used Spanish language texts and videos, fiction and non-fiction, to introduce various social issues facing the U.S.

Spanish-speaking population. These texts and videos served as prompts for writing assignments and face-to-face, in-class discussions. The goal of these activities was to help the students develop their critical thinking abilities around social issues. We then used the Five Why's method (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012) to hone in on our research questions. This technique involved posing a problem and generating five possible reasons why the problem exists. The five reasons were then examined, paying attention to things like bias, stereotypes, plausibility, and correlation vs. causal relationships. One reason would then be selected for further examination and the "five whys" were asked again. Through this guided analysis of problems and causes, we encouraged students to look beyond the simple or superficial and examine ways that issues could be addressed through higher order change, which Kohfeldt and Langhout (2012) describe as "not ameliorative...not the result of changing a component within a system while leaving the system intact. Rather, it is the restructuring of the system's parts" (p. 319). These problem-posing exercises culminated with the students dividing into three interest groups and generating their YPAR problem statements and research questions.

Beginning in this phase and continuing throughout the project, students wrote guided reflection journal entries that include prompts specifically designed to help them think about their own critical agency. As we moved deeper into the research phase, prompts invited students to reflect on moments during this process when they felt powerful or powerless, when they felt like they were "making a difference," or when they took the lead on an activity or let someone else take the lead. These journal topics helped

me understand students' experiences with agency throughout the project and also guided the students through reflecting on agency in their own experiences.

Phase two: Research design and data collection (March). I continued to meet weekly with the class for the duration of their class period. In this phase, the students finalized their research questions, conducted a literature review of their topic, designed their research methods, and collected their data. To scaffold these activities I prepared the students with some of the skills they needed to conduct research. In the first sessions of this phase, students found and examined media, research reports, and news articles on their topics. We provided some direct instruction on conducting effective web searches, and I also brought the students materials that I had found during my own investigations into their topics. In the third session, I brought in my research questions and we talked about what data we would need to answer that question and the ways that we could collect that data. I gave students an overview of qualitative methods, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, observations, and document/artifact collection. We looked at survey designs, talked about Likert scales, and how to compose effective items. Students finalized their own research questions, informed by their literature review, and began brainstorming data collection methods to use and justifying their choices. In consultation with me, they began writing items for their surveys and interviews. In the subsequent sessions, the students built and launched surveys using online tools, practiced interviewing by collecting data from one another, wrote emails to community members requesting information and partnerships, and negotiated the permissions they needed to collect their data (e.g. getting permission from local markets to conduct surveys in their

store). Ultimately, they went into the wider school and community to collect their interview and survey responses. Some of this community data collection continued over Spring Break during the first week of April.

Phase three: Data analysis (April). I continued to meet weekly with the class for the duration of their class period. In this phase, the students analyzed their data, presented their findings in research reports, and decided on actions they would take informed by those findings. To support these skills, we co-constructed how to code data and turn those codes into an analysis, using their anonymized journal entries as samples. I then provided the students with graphic organizers to scaffold their coding and research report writing. The students generated formal reports in which they analyzed their data; made suggestions for improving the situation under study on personal, interpersonal, and structural levels; and proposed service actions that they would take to implement some of these suggestions.

Phase four: Presentation and action (May-early June). I continued to meet weekly with the class for the duration of their class period. I also went into the community with the students as they performed their actions. The purpose of this phase was to distribute their research findings and also to take additional actions (that counted as “service” in Paul County) to hopefully make higher-order changes in their school and community. I will describe the specific actions that each group took in chapter four.

Phase five: Summative reflection (June). During these two sessions, I conducted focus groups with each of the three interest groups and provided each student with an individual reflection form to complete in writing. While we had engaged in

constant reflection throughout the project, the purpose of this phase was to encourage the students to think holistically and critically about their experiences over the course of the project, focusing specifically on the notion of critical agency and on their academic engagement with the project in comparison with their engagement elsewhere in their schooling. I used the data collected from these summative reflection activities in my polyvocal and typological analyses of the students' experiences with critical agency and in my ethnography of the project itself and its impact on students considered by school personnel as "at-risk."

Outline of the Ethnography

My ethnographic study was on-going before, during, and after the YPAR service-learning project. Using multiple qualitative data collection methods and a polyvocal and a typological analysis for coding and interpreting, I examined how students experienced critical agency during and as a result of the YPAR-guided service-learning project. In doing so, I also examined how the students' self-perceptions and academic engagement and the perceptions held by school adults about the students shifted throughout the YPAR-guided service-learning project. In the following sections, I discuss my data collection methods, my analysis, and my presentation of findings. After explaining my intentions for each stage, I discuss how I addressed the trustworthiness of my study.

Data collection methods. In the following section, I describe my data collection methods. Under each subheading, I first mention the context for the data collection, noting when and where it took place. I then describe how I recorded the data and what I was looking for.

Participant observations. I conducted participant observations during the first two weeks of the school semester, after I was given permission to enter the site and had gathered informed consent from all participants. I conducted these observations in the Spanish for Native Speakers II classroom, positioning myself as an observer-participant. The class activities during these sessions focused on all of us, including the teacher, getting to know one another, building relationships and trust, and beginning to unpack our identities. I contributed actively to these class discussions. I also chatted with students before and after class time. During these conversations, we all sat in a circle so as to begin signaling to the students that their voices were of equal weight to ours. During these participant observations, I took handwritten field notes in a journal. No one asked to read them, though I would have shared them if they had requested to do so. I did not audio record these sessions because I wanted the students to feel comfortable talking openly, and since we had not yet built a trusting relationship with one another, I decided to eliminate the formality of a voice recorder which I felt might re-inscribe the very researcher-over-participant dynamic that we were working to dismantle. During these sessions the students asked me many personal questions, both about my identity and why I had chosen to work with them on my project. I answered all of their questions transparently, both to build trust and to model for them the kind of critical reflexivity I wanted from them.

In the observations, I paid careful attention to classroom dynamics, noting who was participatory, who was withdrawn, and how students interacted with each other and the teacher (and me). I also observed the levels of bilingualism in the class in order to get

a feel for the kinds of literacy support that each student would need. I also observed the classroom environment, the rules and policies in place, and how the teacher enacted the curriculum.

This data assisted me in designing activities that attended to diverse levels of language proficiency. It also allowed me to comment on the relationships and perceptions of Self and Other that were forming in the classroom and how these relationships and perceptions of Self and Other evolved over the course of the YPAR-guided service-learning project.

Field notes and session transcriptions. I also took field notes before, during, and after each weekly session that I facilitated and during and after any additional time I spent with the students during phase four of the YPAR-guided service-learning project. I hand-wrote these notes in a journal and would have allowed students and the teacher to see them if they had asked.

I also audio recorded all of our class sessions after the first two described above. I transcribed each audio recording within two days of the session. The audio recordings freed me from the distraction of constant, overt note-taking and allowed me to fully engage with the students while still recording our interactions. It may also gave me a better perspective on my own role in the space and allowed me to critique my involvement more thoughtfully, particularly during phase three, in which I wanted to be especially cautious about how influential I let my own analyses of their data be.

I expected that audio recording might disrupt the normal flow of our sessions, causing students to act differently than they would were the recording device were not

present. I initially planned to mitigate this effect by having the device present in the room during each session in the hopes that students would grow accustomed to its presence and cease to modify their behavior because of it. After the first two sessions using a dedicated voice recording device, I noted that the students found it very distracting and would actively alter their posture and conversation in its presence. In the third session, my device malfunctioned and I switched to using my iPhone to record. I noted that the students were much more relaxed, even though they still knew that they were being recorded. As it seemed that my phone was less threatening than the dedicated recorder, I continued to use it in each subsequent session. While the students did occasionally indicate that they did not want to say something because I was recording, overall, once I began using my phone, they stopped noticeably altering their behavior because of it.

In these field notes and audio transcripts, I paid careful attention to our interactions, particularly how students took on leadership roles or new student identities, how they negotiated conflict physically and verbally, and how they celebrated and supported each other. I also looked for statements that students made indicating their feelings of efficacy, agency, empowerment, autonomy, or the lack of such; ways that they described their social positioning in school and the world and how they described others'; and how they understood and navigated the issues they deemed salient to their lives.

This data was valuable as I examined how students experienced critical agency, giving me insight into their feelings of personal and collective agency, self and public efficacy, as well as how they experienced autonomy through decision-making and negotiation with their peers and me. It also yielded data on how students understood

themselves and others in the social milieu and the level of criticality in their thinking about those issues.

I also kept a field journal beginning as soon as my proposal was approved. In this journal I recorded my own thoughts and feelings about the experience, frustrations and celebrations, related quotes from articles or other texts, and general notes on the project at all stages of implementation. These recordings were included in my own voice file (see “polyvocal analysis” below). Coding and analyzing this journal helped me attend to reflexivity. This process allowed me to look for ways that my theoretical lenses were influencing my observations, places where my interpretation of events differed from other participants and why that might have been, and moments in which I was challenged by participants based on my positionality and theoretical/epistemological assumptions.

Focus groups. While in some ways each class discussion was a focus group, I also conducted one “official” focus group with each group at the end of the project. Since collective agency is valued in YPAR and critical service-learning along with personal agency, it made sense to gather the students together to talk about how they collectively experienced critical agency throughout the project. Moreover, the focus groups (the “official” one and the unstructured group meetings throughout the semester) served pedagogical and political purposes (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011) that supported the overall goal of the YPAR-guided service-learning project and the postcritical ethnographers’ call to attend to informant empowerment. Through the focus groups, I wanted students to think together about their own experiences with critical agency. Hopefully this explicit engagement with the idea of critical agency helped them

understand better their own power and/or ways that their power was supported or suppressed by school. The focus groups also served a political purpose by involving students in brainstorming ways to support critical agency and reflecting on how they experienced it (or not) during the YPAR-guided service-learning project and school in general. The ideas that the students shared about the positives of this project in comparison to their typical classroom experiences have been shared with teachers, service-learning coordinators, other school adults, and other students with the goal of altering current conditions.

We held the focus groups in the classroom and hallway during our next-to-the-last session together. I met with each of the three interest groups for thirty minutes. In addition to the focus groups, the students completed a version of the PCS Service-Learning Reflection forms, which I had altered to include questions aimed specifically at assessing their experiences with critical agency and academic engagement. The focus groups used these forms as discussion prompts interspersed with my group-specific follow-up questions designed to engage the students in critical reflection about their topics. We discussed how the group worked together and their role within it, how the group helped (or did not help) each member feel like they were valuable, and whether they felt like they made a difference with their work and why and on what level (personal, interpersonal, structural). We discussed when they felt a sense of agency in school and during the project and when they felt powerless to change things. We brainstormed ways to help students feel like they could create change in their lives, communities, and schools.

I audio recorded the focus groups and transcribed them the following day. I also took hand-written notes on body language, emotional expressions, and gestures. This data helped me analyze what factors did or did not contribute to their feelings of agency, how they perceived the groups' dynamics, and how they perceived the impact of their work, both on themselves as students-researchers-activists and on the issues they sought to address. It also produced ideas that I have shared with educators in the hope that it will prompt some to take action to promote student agency in schools.

Participant work samples. Throughout the sessions, I collected and made pdf copies of students' work samples, including their *autorretratos*, journal entries, reflection forms, and research documents. These data, particularly the journal entries and reflection forms, allowed me to further analyze how they were developing (or not) a sense of agency and critical thinking skills, how the struggles and successes they experienced impacted this sense and critical awareness, and how they conceptualized the impact of their work, both on themselves as students-researchers-activists and on the issues they sought to address.

Data analysis. In the following subsections, I describe the processes (polyvocal and typological analysis) I used to interpret my data, providing details on how I compiled, coded, and analyzed the stories and information I gathered.

Organization and transcription. I collected a large amount of data over the course of this study. Observation notes, session field notes, focus group and session recording transcriptions (along with their original audio or video files), and work samples were all stored both in hardcopy (if applicable) and electronically. I stored all raw data in

electronic files sorted by type: student work, audio and transcripts, my notes, and session materials. I then organized the hardcopy data into voice folders (see the polyvocal analysis section below) for each student. Each group also had a folder in which I stored research and reflection documents that had been collectively produced. These folders were stored, along with the signed consent forms, in a locked file cabinet in my office. I also kept electronic versions of these voice folders (in addition to the raw data folders mentioned above) both on my password-protected personal computer and in a university-affiliated, password-protected cloud backup.

I handled all of my own data, including the hardcopy-electronic conversions and audio transcriptions. Within two days of each session, I would scan, photocopy, print, and transcribe all of the data collected in that session. Before filing it as described above, I would read it, code it, and make bracketed notes containing my reactions and preliminary analyses. The following sections detail my system for that coding and analysis.

Polyvocal analysis. Hatch (2002) describes a polyvocal analysis as a way to create a final text that honors multiple voices and their unique contexts while also attending to the relationships that those voices have to one another. To create a polyvocal text, Hatch outlines seven steps:

- 1) Read the data for a sense of the whole.
- 2) Identify all of the voices within the data, including your own.
- 3) Re-read the data and mark where each voice is heard.
- 4) Study the data related to each voice, decide which voices to include, and write a narrative for each voice.
- 5) Re-read the data and refine or alter the narratives.
- 6) Participant check the narratives and work with participants to clarify, refine, or change the narratives.
- 7) Write a revised narrative for each voice. (Hatch, 2002, p. 202)

I chose to use a polyvocal analysis technique for organizing my data for two reasons. First, because I wanted to know how students experienced critical agency throughout the project, it made sense to sort data first by student. Each student's experience with critical agency was unique. Paying attention to how each narrative progressed allowed me to see change (or stasis) over time *and* pay close attention to all of the student-specific factors that contributed to that change (or stasis). Second, because I took seriously the power of counter-narratives and the risk of appropriation that comes with ethnographic work, I found the centering of participant voice in polyvocal analysis appealing. A polyvocal technique required that I stay constantly reflective about whose voice was being heard, where, and for what purpose. Moreover, this attention to the multiplicity of voices that contributed to the research project was consistent with the collaborative focus of postcritical ethnography. Rather than presenting data entirely through my own voice with the occasional use of participant quotes, a polyvocal analysis respected the contributions that each participant made by allowing them to speak, to a greater degree, for themselves.

Following Hatch's (2002) steps to conduct this polyvocal analysis, I sorted data collected by "voice" from the start. There were categories for each student, each group, and one for myself. I maintained raw data in its original form and also sorted it into separate electronic and hardcopy files for each participant and group. In a student's file, I compiled their interview responses and work samples along with any notes I made specifically about them during our group sessions. I also included their contributions to group discussions along with enough context for the quotes or notes to make sense. The

group files contained full versions of the audio transcripts of group conversations and work and reflections produced collectively. In my own voice file, I included my contributions to group conversations and notes on my thoughts, feelings, and preliminary analyses.

Once all data was collected, I created a narrative for each “voice” by combining pieces of raw data together. These narratives specifically addressed the student’s experience with critical agency throughout the project. Some raw data was left out and some was slightly manipulated by me for the sake of flow, but I strived to maintain the student’s expression throughout the narrative. Additionally, I included student artwork and poetry as figures within this chapter. Through these narratives, I focused on two things: the student’s biography and expressed worldview (to contextualize their experiences) and their experiences with critical agency as a result of the YPAR service-learning project. For several students from each YPAR group, I also used the polyvocal narrative as an outlet for presenting their group’s YPAR research findings. I did not create a narrative for each group nor for myself. I told these stories through my typological analysis, which I will describe momentarily, throughout the other three data chapters.

Each student had the opportunity to translate, review, and edit their narrative, but while I actively sought their input, all the students simply “approved” what I had written with minor changes or additions, like correcting their age if they had had a birthday since we initially collected their demographics (they did perform the translations, as this was a classroom activity required by the teacher). It may be that they were truly satisfied with

the story as I told it. It may be that they were not, but did not feel as though they could say so (though they were not shy to correct or disagree with me at other points in the semester). I think the most likely reason that they did offer substantive edits was timing. With summer coming, most of the students were more concerned with finding jobs, taking exams, and planning end-of-year parties than with helping me attend to the face validity of my dissertation.

Typological analysis. Hatch (2002) describes typological analysis as a technique in which the researcher divides “everything observed into groups or categories on the basis of some canon for disaggregating the whole phenomenon under study” (p. 152). The goal of this disaggregation is to make apparent relationships and patterns among the data that can be used to support generalizations/claims about the phenomenon under study. My typological analysis allowed me to read within and across cases (each “voice” in the study) so that I could make claims about how students experienced critical agency during our YPAR-guided service-learning project and how students’ self-perceptions and adults’ perceptions of them shifted during our work. For my second research question, I also used a typological technique to examine our process and the benefits and challenges of conducting curriculum-embedded YPAR in a public school setting.

Because typological analyses begin with an established canon of codes (Hatch, 2002), I began with a set of codes derived from my review of literature on youth agency, YPAR, and service-learning. For my first research question, these codes included: personal agency, collective agency, empowerment, disempowerment, self-efficacy, public efficacy, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, transformative resistance,

personal change, interpersonal change, structural change, and student identity. For my second research question, these codes included: adult-youth power dynamic, coercion vs. liberation, deficit ideology, asset ideology, dialogic engagement, and practical constraints. Other codes emerged as I read the data, including individualism, racism, fear, personal identification, empathy, self-perception, adult perceptions, YPAR+service-learning, YPAR benefit, and YPAR challenge. I began coding data as soon as I gathered it. With each new piece of data, I applied already-generated codes and looked for new ones. As new codes were added to the code book, I returned periodically to already coded data and re-read them applying new codes.

Following Hatch's (2002) steps for typological analysis, after the first round of coding, I sorted the data into files by primary code. Each file contained sub-codes, as well (see Table 1). I then examined the data in each code file for patterns, relationships, and themes. Once identified, I examined whether these patterns, relationships, and themes held across sub-codes within a code file and across code files. I began making generalizations about these patterns, relationships, and themes and sorted the data again into categories based on these generalizations (see Table 2). The data sorted into each category constituted the evidence that supported that generalization.

<i>Table 1</i>	
<i>Code Book</i>	
Primary Codes	Secondary Codes
Criticality	Personal Level-Thinking Interpersonal Level-Thinking Structural Level-Thinking Individualism Self-Identification with Topic

	Empathy Social Justice-Orientation
Agency	Personal Agency Collective Agency Self-efficacy Public efficacy Empowerment Autonomy Self-defeating Resistance Conformist Resistance Transformative Resistance Individualism Personal Level Impact Interpersonal Level Impact Structural Level Impact Fear Self-Identification with Topic Empathy Social Justice-Orientation
Student Identity	Successful Marginalized Bilingual Trouble-maker Leader ESOL Persecuted Motivated Academic Engagement Reasons to Drop Out Reasons to Stay In
Institutionalizing YPAR	Adult-Youth Power Dynamic Youth Autonomy Youth Voice Coercion Motivation Curriculum/Content Instruction
Blending YPAR and Service-Learning	Investigation, Preparation and Planning, Action, Reflection, Demonstration (IPARD) What Counts as Service? What Counts as Community? Server-Served Construction Asset Ideology Deficit Ideology

<i>Table 2</i>
<i>Generalizations Across Codes</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Criticality • Development of Agency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agency’s Level of “Critical-ness” ○ Fear’s Impact on Agency • Individualism’s Impact on Criticality, Agency, and YPAR-guided Service-Learning • Self-Identification with Issue’s Impact on Criticality, Agency, and YPAR-guided Service-Learning • YPAR’s Impact on Student Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Self-perceptions ○ Adult Perceptions of Students • YPAR’s Pedagogical Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Curriculum connections ○ Assessment protocol connections ○ Research skills ○ Literacy skills ○ Civic skills • YPAR’s Ideological Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Adult-youth power dynamics ○ Deficit vs asset models ○ Active vs. passive teaching and learning • YPAR’s Practical Concerns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Timelines ○ Resources ○ Access • YPAR + Service-Learning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ YPAR’s Positive Impact on Service-Learning ○ Service-Learning’s Positive Impact on YPAR ○ Institutional Challenges

Interpretation strategies. As I interpreted the patterns and the factors contributing to them, I filtered them through my critical theoretical lens, pulling from the various critical traditions (critical youth studies, CRT, LatCrit, etc.) as they became salient. These theories helped me connect my students’ experiences to macro-level themes. I also paid attention to how the students’ experiences with critical agency were

affected by elements of school and community cultures. For example, how did expectations of typical adult-over-youth and other power dynamics influence student behaviors in our sessions? How did their experience in our sessions influence their opinions of these dynamics in the wider school culture and community? Did their actions change? Did they express certain emotions related to these opinions? How did the students' ideological orientations affect their experiences?

Presentation of analysis. While I have also presented at practitioner-oriented and scholarly conferences and have published/submitted for publication in practitioner-oriented and scholarly books and journals, I am presenting this work in its entirety through this dissertation. I have followed the standard chapter format of background, question, purpose, and significance; review of literature; methods; results and analysis; and conclusion and recommendations (Bryant, 2004). My results and analyses are divided into four data chapters. In the first, I present an ethnography of the YPAR-guided service-learning project, focusing on how the YPAR-guided service-learning experience impacted both youth and adult perceptions, how we navigated the challenges of conducting YPAR within an institutional settings, and how service-learning and YPAR played together during our project. In addition to presenting these findings, this chapter, because it provides a detailed description of each group's YPAR/service-learning process, sets the context for the following three data chapters that focus on the students' experiences with critical agency.

In the second data chapter, I present the polyvocal student narratives. As previously described, these narratives provide biographical context for each student and

present the group's YPAR results, as well as attend to each student's experience with critical agency. Throughout this chapter, I have included visual images and QR codes that readers can scan to view or listen to non-written pieces. These narratives are also bilingual. Unlike in the other data chapters, I did not provide translations within the narratives, but offered translated versions immediately following each narrative. As in the other data chapters, my translations are contained within brackets. As with their YPAR research findings, the students translated their own narratives, as the teacher viewed doing so as a pedagogical opportunity, though in some cases I adjusted their syntax or word choice (with their permission) for clarity.

The third and fourth data chapters include my typological analysis of the students' experiences with critical agency. I divided this analysis into two chapters. The first focuses on how the students' criticality developed during the project and why. The second focuses on how they experienced agency and the extent to which that agency was critical and why.

In my conclusions and recommendations chapter I offer critiques of our practice, practical suggestions for other educators and YPAR and service-learning practitioners, and an argument, based on my findings and extant research, for why more public school educators should consider incorporating YPAR-guided service-learning into their classroom practice, especially for students of color or otherwise marginalized youth.

Trustworthiness

Because my research lens is critical, I cannot claim objectivity of any kind. I am not neutral. I was a participant researcher with an openly political aim for my research.

To address the trustworthiness of my research, I used Lather's (2003) categories for validity in openly ideological research: triangulation, face validity, construct validity, and catalytic validity.

The study had a basic triangulation of methods, employing audio transcripts, focus groups, work samples, observations, and field notes to gather data on the same general questions in a variety of ways. I also contend that I, in a sense, triangulated by engaging in both my ethnography and the YPAR projects with the students since we addressed critical agency through both methodologies, even if the central point of inquiry in the YPAR projects was not "critical agency."

Lather (2003) uses the term face validity to refer to the process of member checking. She defines member checking as "recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents" (p. 191). I attempted to attend to face validity in three ways. First, students had the opportunity to help me code and analyze my data as part of our preparation for the YPAR project. In this phase, they were able to see and respond to preliminary analysis that I had already done. While their codes largely matched mine (the data set related to their student identities and perceptions of school), the lens through which some of them filtered their analysis (individualism) produced very different notions than mine. Navigating this difference gave me additional insights into their worldviews and how they were impacting their criticality and their senses of agency. Second, students had the opportunity to read and revise their polyvocal narrative. Though none offered substantive changes, they did have the authentic opportunity to do so. Finally, students also checked their narratives through the translation process. I also made

my typological analysis chapters available to them, though none took the opportunity to participant check them.

Lather (2003) describes construct validity in terms of both attending to changes in a priori theory throughout the research process and an attention to how positionalities are confronted by theory and data (p. 191). Construct validity enters this project in two ways. First, the participatory nature of our YPAR service-learning project helped me to question my positionality and the effect that my Self had in the research. As a socially privileged White woman, I had been called out before by high school students who saw my attempts to understand their worlds as disingenuous. I had also been called out by Latin@ students for being an Anglo woman teaching “Spanish” culture, their implication being that this was not my culture to teach and that “Spanish” culture was something too diverse to be “taught” anyway. I experienced similar “calling outs” during this project, as I discuss in the fourth chapter. These “calling outs” helped me to stay aware of my Self and how I saw and was seen by others. They also helped me to stay aware of how I may have been stereotyping or erroneously grouping students together and making assumptions about their lives. Moreover, they helped me to question the ways that my critical, macro-level assessments of situations may feel irrelevant to those suffering the consequences of those systems of oppression.

Attending to the potential disconnect between macro analyses and lived experiences, Anderson (1989) describes the challenges of construct validity posed by conducting ethnography from a critical theoretical position. While critical ethnographers “engage in standard practices...such as member checking and triangulation,...their

agenda of social critique, their attempt to locate...meanings in larger impersonal systems...and the resulting 'front-endedness' of much of their research" (p. 253) raises additional validity issues. In other words, critical theorists may bring too many unquestioned assumptions to their analysis, resulting in findings "tipped in favor of a priori theory" (Hyttén, 2004, p. 100). Thus, part of my construct validity derived from my adherence to postcritical ethnography's call to be reflexive about theoretical assumptions and biases. Critical theories informed my data analysis, and our entire YPAR process as well, and I was transparent about that influence. Moreover, especially when navigating the students' adherence to an ideology of individualism that often rubbed against the criticality that I was hoping to engage them in, I had to work dialectically with my a priori theories, using my field journal and bracketed note-taking on transcripts and observation notes to notice moments where my critical lenses served to explain well a phenomenon or experience and also the moments when they did not and other theories need to be consulted, including the students' own ideology.

Catalytic validity was of central importance to me, not only because of its contributions to my study's trustworthiness, but also because this research was in the pursuit of theoretical and material transformation. Lather (2003) calls catalytic validity the "degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire terms 'conscientization,' knowing reality in order to better transform it" (p. 191). This notion is central to YPAR, critical service-learning, and postcritical ethnography. To be sure, I measured my success as a researcher by the extent to which students through the YPAR-guided service-learning and I through this ethnography were

able to better understand critical agency (conceptually and within ourselves) and the possibilities of YPAR and service-learning for transformational change and academic engagement with marginalized youth and *act* on that understanding.

In sum, the trustworthiness of this project derived from the collaborative nature of YPAR and postcritical ethnography. Claiming these research paradigms meant that I was also building into my methods specific spaces for personal and theoretical reflexivity, a deep respect for participant knowledge and ability, constant member checking and shared analysis, and an aim of material transformation. In other words, both YPAR and postcritical ethnography as methodologies naturally supported each level of validity that Lather (2003) describes.

Summary

To study students' experiences with critical agency, I designed both the pedagogical project through which students experienced that critical agency (the YPAR-guided service-learning task) and a postcritical ethnography to study that pedagogical project. I chose postcritical ethnography as my methodology for examining our YPAR-guided service-learning venture because I believed that its focus on transformation, collaboration, pedagogy, and reflexivity blended well with YPAR's similar tenets and allowed me as the university researcher to stay true to my personal theoretical framework. It would seem disingenuous to engage with students in a collaborative YPAR project designed to respect and empower them as change agents and legitimate producers of knowledge only to relegate them to a disengaged "subject" status in my own examination of our work together. Postcritical ethnography allowed me to continue

challenging the researcher-over-researched/teacher-over-student/adult-over-youth power dynamics already being questioned in the YPAR project. I intended for the lines between these two layers of research to blur, because in doing so, we better fulfilled the empowerment and social transformation missions essential to both YPAR and postcritical ethnography.

CHAPTER IV

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE YPAR-GUIDED SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

As discussed in previous chapters, existing research on the pedagogical benefits of YPAR indicates that youth in YPAR (re)gain a sense of autonomy, motivation, and empowerment (Cammarota & Romero, 2011; Irrizary, 2011; Ozer & Wright, 2012) which contributes to their academic (re)engagement (Irrizary, 2011; Romero et al., 2008). Additionally, YPAR can produce positive changes in youth-adult relations through “professionalization” and its challenge to deficit-based views of youth (Langhout et al., 2008; Ozer & Wright, 2012) and can contribute unique perspectives and knowledges to policy and political debates (Fine, 2008). But because of its deeply political and counter-school-cultural bend (Ozer et al., 2010), coupled with the practical challenges of implementing any alternative pedagogy within the increasingly standardized and scripted system of public education, many teachers avoid YPAR as an institutionalize practice.

The teacher with whom I conducted this project and I chose to take this risk and do it anyway because (a) we believed in the importance of social justice-oriented and empowering, asset-based pedagogy, particularly with marginalized students and (b) we felt that YPAR blended well with the district’s highly-promoted service-learning program and with all state-mandated curriculum standards and assessment protocols, which meant that we could work in the gap—playing by the “rules” while simultaneously resisting the system that produced them.

In this chapter, I explore our—the teacher’s, the students’ and my—experience with the YPAR-guided service-learning project itself. Using data from my field notes; student work samples; and transcripts of sessions, informal conversations, and focus groups, I both describe our project and analyze its impact on students’ self-perceptions and academic motivation/engagement and school adults’ perceptions of these youth. I then examine how the teacher, students, and I were able to navigate the challenges of institutionalizing YPAR and blending it with service-learning and the benefits we discovered in doing so.

Overview of Our YPAR-Guided Service-Learning Project

During the 2015 spring semester, I partnered with a classroom Spanish teacher (Mrs. Brandon) at a public high school in North Carolina to fully integrate a YPAR-guided service-learning project into the curriculum for her Spanish for Native Speakers II course. I was a university researcher and former high school Spanish teacher interested in YPAR and service-learning, and the cooperating teacher wanted to bring more meaningful, social justice-oriented teaching and learning to her classes. As former colleagues, she and I had stayed in contact over the last seven years and frequently consulted on pedagogy, curriculum design, classroom “management,” and the politics of teaching and innovating within our district. Upon transferring to the school in which we conducted this project, Mrs. Brandon had realized that the school’s existing Spanish course offerings underserved the large population of native Spanish speakers. She fought to implement both a Spanish for Native Speakers sequence and an Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish Language program. Throughout that process, she and I consulted on course

content and methods, looking for ways to make the Spanish for Native Speakers and AP courses more culturally responsive, curiosity-led, and social justice-oriented. When I asked her whether she would want to cooperate on this YPAR-guided service-learning project, she excitedly agreed. We were both White, Anglo women from the Southern United States who learned Spanish academically.

My participant group within the class consisted of 14 sophomore, junior, and senior students all of whom identified as “Hispanic” (the term they consistently used instead of “Latin@”). More specifically, one student identified as Colombian, one as Cuban-Puerto Rican, and the rest as Mexican or Mexican-American. All but one (Nick) had participated in ESOL class at some point in their schooling. Eight of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch, the public school marker of low-socioeconomic status. Only five students reported having parents who spoke fluent English at home. All had either immigrant family members and/or were immigrants themselves. Some were undocumented and/or had undocumented or recently deported family members. All but two (Ana and Nick) were set to be the first in their families to graduate from high school. They enrolled in Spanish for Native Speakers II in order to fulfill their World Languages requirement for graduation with a College Prep diploma (the standard diploma offered in our district).

Most of these students had taken Spanish for Native Speakers I together (with a different teacher) the previous semester and many lived in the same neighborhoods. Thus, they all had previous social relationships prior to entering this class. In their Spanish for Native Speakers I course, some of them had participated in a service-learning project

translating documents, hosting information booths, and raising funds for a local health services organization. Their work centered on HIV/AIDS, and most of the students who had participated reported enjoying the experience, which was largely disconnected from their daily classroom work. That project was also their only service-learning experience prior to our YPAR-guided service-learning work.

Our project ran for the full 18-week duration of the course. The school used a mixed schedule format in which some courses ran for the entire school year and others, like our course, were semester “blocks.” The Spanish for Native Speakers II course met for hour and a half sessions every school day. I met with the students to facilitate the YPAR projects each Wednesday for the duration of the class period. Additionally, the classroom teacher wove the topics of inquiry that the students selected for their YPAR work into her daily classroom practice. For example, she taught grammar and vocabulary using scholarly and journalistic articles on their topics; used short stories and poems, songs, and artwork related to their topics for their literary study; and gave them topic-related prompts for their informal writing and speaking assessments.

The Problem-Posing and Consciousness-Raising Phase

The first phase of YPAR attended to consciousness-raising and problem-posing. We collectively brainstormed, investigated (via internet searches, scholarly and journalistic articles I provided, and personal stories), and discussed issues students identified as salient to their lives. The goals of this project phase were (a) to identify possible points of inquiry for the YPAR projects, (b) to raise the students’ critical

consciousness around these social issues, and (c) to begin modeling how to conduct a literature review on a topic.

In our first session in which we discussed identity, the students brought up racism, nativism, and feeling profiled by school and community adults. Based on these themes, the teacher and I introduced videos, infographics, and articles about the school-to-prison pipeline. I led class discussions about the information we had read and how it related to the students' lived experiences. The students then did a WebQuest in which they investigated youth-led activist organizations around the nation who are attempting to close the school-to-prison pipeline. Some students, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, strongly resisted the idea that racism played a role in how students were disciplined and rejected the notion of the pipeline altogether. We noticed that the students who personally identified with the topic were the most willing to critically engage with it. Hypothesizing that students personally affected by a topic might be more willing to critically engage with it rather than victim-blame because they could empathize with the humans affected, and knowing that we would not find a topic with which every student could personally identify, we decided instead to introduce literature into our issue investigations hoping that the stories would work to humanize the topic, even if fictionally.

For our second issue investigation we chose to study the connections between crime and poverty rates. The teacher and I knew that about half of the students lived in varying degrees of poverty, so we anticipated that they would personally connect to the topic. The teacher and I chose the short story "Los gallinazos sin plumas" and the song

“La historia de Juan” to supplement our non-fiction readings. While all the students were deeply sympathetic to the characters in the story and song, that sympathy did not convert to empathy as we began to discuss the realities of the link between crime and poverty rates. Many students, personally impacted by crime and poverty or not, were still hesitant to critically engage with the topic, as I discuss in the chapter six. Our final pre-YPAR project issue investigation called the students to account for the disproportionate rates of poverty among races in the U.S. We read journalistic and scholarly articles on the topic and held class discussions in which I modeled the Five Whys (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012) method of analysis. This method’s structure did help the students identify personal, interpersonal, and sociopolitical/structural/systemic reasons for the issue at hand, and as I discuss in the following chapter, more students demonstrated an ability to critically engage with social issues after this third investigation.

After these three sessions of problem-posing, the students divided into three groups based on their interests. One group chose to investigate police brutality and racial profiling in their community/school; another group chose to research the experiences and outcomes of students labeled “ESOL” (English for Speakers of Other Languages). A third group initially chose to investigate the health services/support available to students at school (given the lack of a school nurse four days a week). Ultimately, this last group disbanded, with two students abandoning the YPAR project all together and pursuing an alternate research assignment, one student joining the ESOL group, and the remaining two students refocusing their investigation on HIV outreach within the Latin@ population in our community/school.

The Research Design and Data Collection Phase

The YPAR process for each group followed a similar pattern once the students established their topic of inquiry. First, they conducted a review of literature in order to understand what information already existed about their topic. This meant, for example, reading district reports on ESOL, examining news articles and YouTube videos on police overreach nationally and locally, or reading research conducted by local activist organizations on Latin@ experiences/issues in our community. The second step required students to design a research question and state a goal for their investigation. As part of this process, they also stated why the work was meaningful to them and what they could offer to the existing body of knowledge on the topic.

The next step was to design a method for gathering more data about the topic in order to answer the research question. After I provided an overview of qualitative methods, using my own data collection protocols for this ethnography as examples, each group chose the methods they felt would be most useful for gathering the kind of data they needed to answer their research question. Using the information about qualitative methods I had provided, they explained their choices in writing. Each group chose a mix of surveys and interviews. The ESOL and Police Brutality groups both used an online survey tool to collect responses from participants that they felt would be too difficult or too risky to talk about in person. To disseminate these surveys, the teacher and I helped them snowball sample beginning with our connections in the educator and law enforcement communities, respectively, who we encouraged to further disseminate the survey links. In order to support the students' feelings of self-efficacy as researchers, the

ESOL and Police Brutality groups also conducted face-to-face interviews with their peers about their experiences with their topics. These peer interviews allowed them to both gather useable data and test out the effectiveness of their items, get comfortable with recording and note-taking, and rehearse asking questions and generating follow-ups. Additionally, the Police Brutality group sent email interviews to community activists who had been mentioned in local news articles about police brutality and racial profiling. The HIV group conducted phone interviews of local HIV activists, ultimately partnering with the Health Project (a local HIV/AIDS organization) for their work as a result of these phone interviews. As part of this partnership, they designed a survey to collect data aimed at helping the Health Project improve its outreach in the Spanish-speaking community. They chose to conduct this survey offline, visiting Mexican grocery stores in the area and surveying willing participants face-to-face.

The students had full ownership over designing these data collection tools, something with which they had no prior experience. To scaffold the process, I taught them specific survey/interview writing skills (e.g. how to use a Likert scale, avoid leading language, phrase an item to avoid a single-word response) and offered general item-writing advice, proofreading, and help with technology. I also advised them on how to find and then ethically recruit participants, protect participant anonymity, and professionally engage with participants during data collection (including helping them phrase recruitment emails that accompanied survey links and approach scripts for the face-to-face interviews).

Throughout this phase, the teacher and I noted that the students reveled in their new role as researchers. My field note journal from this phase is full of exclamations about how students who had long been branded by school adults as “lazy” or “dumb” and who had almost completely disengaged from academics were active and valuable participants in this work. For example, Raul, who was failing all of his other classes, worked diligently for an entire class period and continued for homework producing the items the group used in their peer survey. When another teacher expressed shock at Raul “actually doing something,” Guillermo muttered, “It’s because this is actually important.” Raul went on to administer outside of class and over his Spring Break nine face-to-face peer interviews, a level of dedication to the work and his role as researcher that impressed even his classmates. When I asked why he dedicated himself to doing such good work on this project he replied “I like that you care what we have to say, like people want to hear these stories, so I’m working hard on it.”

Other adults in the school also took note of the students’ professionalism in conducting their research. A staff member, who was interviewed early on by the health services group that ultimately disbanded, remarked that “They were so professional and excited about what they were doing. They really wanted to understand how things worked, maybe change things, but not just complain.” Even the Mrs. Brandon admitted to being surprised at how dedicated to their work the students were, stating:

It was really good for me to see them doing this. I try to shut out the negativity and pre-existing conceptions other teachers express about these kids, but it still gets in. So watching them do this, it has changed what I think is possible to do with kids. And not just these kids who are supposedly harder to work with. All kids.

Her comment speaks to why YPAR work can be so beneficial in combatting the deficit ideology that too often frames how teachers interact with marginalized students and those labeled “at-risk” by their schools. Not only did their work give them a space to exercise autonomy and embody a successful student persona, but it helped to shift adult perceptions of them, as well.

As Ozer and Wright (2012) found in their analysis of student and adult relationships in YPAR in urban settings, the YPAR experience does create spaces for adults and students to positively change their perceptions of youth autonomy. Through what they call “professionalization”—the students’ “training in research methods, development of communication and presentation skills, and their generation of relevant data to support their recommendations” (p. 279)—students participating in YPAR cultivate a participatory role within the broader school context that is significantly more meaningful, agentic, and respected by adults than the roles of other students. Bertrand (2014) warns, though, that an emphasis on performance, which could be understood as the superficial aspects of this “professionalism,” can inhibit real reciprocal and respectful dialogue between youth of color engaged in YPAR and school adults because it locates the adult’s focus on the students’ academic achievement or style of presentation instead of on their message. While some of our school adults did express surprise, which Bertrand posits represents this performance focus, or comment on the *way* the students engaged with the work, most of them *also* commented on the quality of their findings and took those findings seriously. Interactions with adult partners and observers continued to evidence these shifts in perception during subsequent phases.

The Data Analysis Phase

Following the data collection, the students entered their data analysis and presentation of findings phase. As with data collection, qualitative data analysis was a new skill set they had to learn. To scaffold this process, we co-constructed how to generate codes and organize them into themes and subthemes by jointly coding a set of their journal entries (an informal writing assignment in which the students described their perceptions of themselves as students and their opinions about school). I then gave the students a graphic organizer to help them structure their thoughts and encouraged them to work in pairs to code their own data. As in the collection phase, the students embarked on these tasks with gusto. Joaquín, another student with a reputation for academic disengagement, quickly took the coding lead in the Police Brutality group. When I commented on his diligence and the quality of his work, he smiled contentedly while Roberto exclaimed, “Well of course he worked hard on it, Mrs. Bocci. It matters to him. He’s interested.”

The students coded and looked for patterns and themes during one class period and during the week for homework. We dedicated the next three sessions to writing formal reports of their findings. Once again, we co-constructed what this might look like using the data set from my ethnography that we had jointly coded the week prior. Then I gave the students another graphic organizer to scaffold the flow of their report. Working in small groups within each group, the students produced formal research reports in Spanish, which they then translated into English so that they could be shared with non-Spanish-speakers. As part of their reports, the students brainstormed actions that they

could take to resolve the issues that they had uncovered and/or made suggestions for how policies or systems needed to change to improve the situation under study.

During this phase, which involved deep thinking and heavy academic work, most of the students continued to engage and take seriously their roles as researchers. As Roberto had noted regarding Joaquín's dedication to the coding task, because the students saw their work as important and interesting, they were highly motivated to complete it. Moreover, they were bolstered by the affirmative attention that other school adults gave them in response to their findings. School adults recognized the students' research-based contributions as unique and valuable. One ESOL teacher stated, "Their idea is so good, partnering former ESOL students as mentors for younger ones, why haven't we thought to do this before?" The assistant principal was also impressed with the ESOL group's proposal, told them so, and initially granted them permission to execute their actions as they had planned them (this permission was later revoked by the principal and hindered by other inter-school politics). Talking to me later, he stated "I think they showed real initiative and scholarship, and their plan [to set up an intergenerational ESOL mentoring/tutoring program between the high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools] is brilliant and truly needed. I'm very sorry that it didn't launch." Even another teacher who I witnessed on multiple occasions berating the students as "useless *pendejos*," "*flojos*," and "lazy bums," ultimately joined our project, working with the HIV group to try and organize a dinner event on behalf of the Health Project.

The meaningfulness of their work, and the fact that their voices were taken seriously by school adults who listened to the content of their message and responded

affirmatively, contributed to their academic (re)engagement during the YPAR phase of the project. As Cammarota and Romero (2011) assert, YPAR is “a pedagogical application of funds of knowledge” and “a bridge between their home culture and the classroom” (p. 492), meaning that the identities of students engaged in YPAR are deeply respected and seen as assets in the classroom (as opposed to the typical deficit-oriented philosophy that guides much educational policy and practice). Our students felt this respect and began to reimagine their identities as Hispanic (the term they consistently preferred) or ESOL kids as empowering rather than marginalizing. As Raul, Jason, Guillermo, and Roberto all noted, “What we found out from our interviews, and our own stories, it’s really different than what the police say and what others say about [police brutality and racial profiling]. We have a side too. They need to hear it. Here we got to tell them our side.” In the service action phase of the project, this reframing and valuing of their identities intensified.

The Service/Action Phase

The fourth step in the project was to take a change-seeking action based on their results. This phase most closely resembled “service-learning” as our district described it, though we were ultimately able to fit all of our work into the accepted service-learning framework, as I discuss momentarily. As was to be expected, the service actions were fraught with logistical problems, and what the students planned to do and what they were actually able to implement differed greatly. But as Jessica said during her final reflection interview:

The experience was good because it helped me learn that this world is not easy and you have to work really hard even for small things...like we had this whole great idea laid out and we felt like anything was possible [laughing]...but even if it doesn't work out, you've still learned something through the process.

Her sentiment echoed the students' general sense expressed during those final reflections that even if it did not all go as planned, it was still very much worth doing.

The ESOL group's service. The ESOL group determined through their research that having an older sibling who had been through the ESOL program was related to more positive outcomes and more affirmative experiences for current students. They designed a plan for a mentoring/tutoring program in their high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools in which former, older ESOL students would be paired with younger, current ESOL students. Inspired by a "big brother/big sister" model, they saw these older students serving as homework helpers; cultural liaisons and translators between teachers and parents; and mentors who had "been there and done that" and could offer moral support and advice to students, their families, and classroom teachers on how to best serve their mentee. They wanted the interactions to occur during school hours or immediately before or after classes (which would be during someone's school hours given the way our district schedules school start and end times) because of transportation, space, extracurricular obligations and other logistical concerns that would hinder meeting in the evenings or on weekends. They also believed that observing one another's school experiences first-hand could be valuable for both the mentor and mentee. They wanted the program to be longitudinal and multigenerational, continuing year-to-year and

involving alumni. Given this design, mentees may eventually become mentors themselves, but could still maintain in contact with their original mentor.

The elementary, middle, and high school ESOL teachers, along with the Assistant Principal over the World Languages and ESOL departments at the high school, were all supportive of the idea, but inter-school politics (e.g. whose students gave up class time?, when?, where?, who supervised the sessions?, who provided transportation?, etc.) ultimately doomed the project. The students scaled back and decided to try a pilot program with the middle school students (whose campus they could easily walk to and back during our class period), but the principal of the high school revoked the permission for this action previously granted, citing liability concerns and policy that prevented service-learning from occurring during school hours (not an actual policy). With those doors closed, the students partnered with a local community organization to work afterschool as tutors/mentors for recent Latin@ immigrant children.

In the execution of their project, logistics continued to challenge us. The students had no transportation and the new site was a 20-minute drive from the school. After taking my own, the teachers, and the students' afterschool obligations into account, María and Carrie were able to attend the tutoring twice a week for the first four weeks, accompanied by me on Tuesdays and by the classroom teacher on Thursdays. For the last two weeks, they could only go on Tuesdays with me. Ana was only able to go once, due to her other volunteer and extracurricular obligations. Joey and Juana were not able to go at all due to childcare and work responsibilities they had at home. However, all students continued to support the tutoring work during our weekly in-school sessions, designing

Jeopardy-style EOG review games for the children to play, making encouraging posters to put up in the trailer where the tutoring occurred, and writing letters campaigning for the administrations in their high school and its feeder schools to change the rules to allow for their work as originally intended to occur in the future.

While each had a different experience with the service, each student in the group still expressed by the conclusion of the project that they felt they had made a difference through doing it. As will be discussed in chapter seven, they all agreed that while their interpersonal work tutoring the children was important and impactful, the biggest impact their project could have related to their originally designed project, the mentor program for ESOL students within the schools. All the students hoped that their letters and campaigning would work and that, even if they were not the ones to execute the plan, the ESOL teachers, all of whom had expressed support for the project, might take the lead and bring it to life.

The police brutality group's service. The police brutality/racial profiling group took up counter-storytelling as their action and produced posters, videos, spoken word poetry, and art to juxtapose statistics and their personal experiences and those of their peers with the dominant narrative espoused in local news reports and by the law enforcement officers they surveyed. These pieces were shared with community adults (including school administrators, school resource officers [SROs], and police) in the hope of sparking dialog. Their SRO agreed to a dialog with them at the end of their project, but the students ultimately decided that it was too personally risky to share their findings with him in person. They also doubted (and I agreed with them based on conversations with

the SRO) that the SRO's offer was a genuine offer of democratic dialog. They suspected that it would turn into a lecture from him about how they were wrong and they did not trust themselves to remain "subservient," as Guillermo put it, were the conversations to turn against them. The teacher and I tried to set up a dialog with another, more receptive SRO in the district, but scheduling conflicts prevented the meeting.

In writing their counter-story poetry, the students met with a slam poet and activist from a local HBCU who led them through a writing workshop to help them craft their pieces. She invited them to share their work at a public poetry slam in the community. Guillermo expressed interest in doing so and remained in contact with her after the project concluded. He continues to write and perform social critiquing poetry. The other students, even those less innately interested in poetic expression, also enjoyed the poetry writing and agreed that it helped them express their feelings and findings in a powerful way. They also appreciated the poet/activist sharing her work about police brutality with them, and they noted that the Black female voice was one that they had largely left out of their own data collection, demonstrating a measure of reflexivity about their work.

Their posters and video were compilations of their research reports and their personal stories. They blended music and images with their findings and suggestions for improvement to create what they hoped would be a powerful statement for those viewing their work. They put the posters up around their school and taped QR codes with links to their video around the school and town. Additionally, with their permission, I shared the video link on the Facebook group page for the university undergraduate course that I

teach. The students chose not to appear on camera in the video or use names in the stories they shared, again hoping to avoid potentially dangerous attention from law enforcement or the administration. They recognized in their final focus group that these actions were more passive than they could have been and that passivity limited their impact. They had variously considered attending city council meetings, working with local activists to stage a “Black Lives Matter”-inspired protest (though this was technically forbidden under our district’s service-learning regulations), and requesting meetings with other school adults to present their findings, but in each case, they ultimately decided that it was too risky to draw personal attention to themselves. Based on these feelings and again demonstrating a reflexive analysis, Guillermo made a point to include in his recommendations for future change that the open community-police dialogs he was recommending “solo pueden ocurrir si la gente se siente seguro y protegido y no tiene miedo de castigo por sus opiniones [can only occur if the people feel safe and protected and are not afraid of punishment for their opinions].”

The HIV group’s service. Unlike the other groups, the HIV group struggled to come up with an action that they felt would be “meaningful.” Their definition of “meaningful” as concrete, measurable action limited the kinds of activities they were willing to consider. They rejected some of the actions suggested by the Health Project on the grounds that “we didn’t really see the point, I mean it was just talking to people and getting information out.” They were also stymied by the Health Project’s preference for volunteers over the age of 18. Since these students were 15 and 16, they were often ineligible to participate in certain events. They also struggled to see how the survey work

they did on behalf of the Health Project, which had asked them to identify possible cultural, linguistic, religious, etc. barriers to effective HIV outreach in the Spanish-speaking community and offer ways to overcome them, was a form of service.

Eventually, as I discuss in later chapters, they grudgingly accepted that work as part of their service, but they still hesitated to take any credit for the future impact it might have.

With time running out (this group had begun working later than the others, forming after the dissolution of the first health services-focused group), they decided to host a dinner party on behalf of the Health Project as part of the organization's city-wide annual fund- and consciousness-raising event. But with less than two weeks before the event was scheduled to occur, limited financial resources, and resistance from their parents, they were unable to follow through with the plan. Instead, they held several fundraising drives outside of the same grocery stores where they had previously surveyed. They raised less than ten dollars, and Jessica found the experience "awkward and embarrassing." In her final reflection, she decided that a better tactic would have been to conduct another survey, testing out some of their ideas for improving outreach, and then handing out information about the Health Project. She noted:

Some of the questions on the first survey, people didn't give very detailed answers. We still had some yes/no ones on there. We needed to reword and try those again. And we could ask about our ideas for outreach, whether they think they would help. Plus, it was easier to do the survey than ask for money. The survey made us feel professional and it was easier to talk to people. I felt silly asking for money.

But, as I discuss in later chapters, despite their problems, Jessica was emphatic that the experience had been positive and empowering, again reflecting Ozer and Wright (2012)

and Cammarota and Romero's (2011) findings about the impact of YPAR on student self-perception:

What I learned about HIV, it helps me in my life, like you know [shyly implying her *sex* life]. Like, I will always use protection, and not just because I don't want to get pregnant. Also, I felt really...I guess...professional...handing out the information and conducting the survey. Like people took us seriously. And THP, they valued our Spanish and our cultural connection, like we were liaisons to our people even if they wouldn't let us do some stuff because we were young. And doing the whole project ourselves, that was really motivating and interesting. School needs to be more like that.

Reflection Phase

While reflection and revision was on-going throughout each phase of the project, we spent our last two sessions together engaged in formal, summative reflection. In the first of these reflection sessions, I conducted three 30-minute semi-structured focus groups, one with each YPAR group. While I talked with one group, the others wrote out their reflections on their role within the project and their feelings about the experience as a whole.

In addition to providing insights into how the students experienced critical agency during the project, which I discuss in the following three chapters, these reflections also reinforced our finding that, consistent with the existing literature on the topic, participating in this YPAR-guided service-learning project had helped many of them reimagine themselves as successful students and reframe certain identity elements as assets that were otherwise positioned in the school and community as deficits.

Their bilingualism, for example, was something that they often spoke of in only negative ways. In one journal entry, we asked the students to talk about how being

bilingual affected them. Ana's response was representative: "Ser bilingue me afecta negativamente porque todavia confundo palabras y escribo mal [mi bilingualism affects me negatively because I still confuse words and write bad]." Juana added, "Tengo acento y la gente asume que soy ilegal [I have an accent an people asume I'm illegal]. María, speaking specifically about her former ESOL designation, also added: "Being a native speaker made me feel left out, like with read alouds and getting letters and stuff in Spanish. Kids would look at me funny and I'd feel embarrassed." But by these final reflections, the students had begun to talk about their bilingualism in a more positive light:

María: Like how I felt bad about stuff when I was an ESOL kid, but I look back now and I see that those things were helpful. So I can share those experiences with the kids we tutored with.

Carrie: Yeah, like when we first pulled up, they were all like 'You Mexican, too?!' And they were super excited to talk to us about what it was like going to school and being Mexican.

María: Yeah, that's something that we could only offer because of who we are.

In this conversation, the students shifted from seeing their identities as Mexican-American, bilingual, former ESOL kids as a deficit to recognizing that that positioning made them uniquely positioned to help and be successful within the context of the project.

The HIV group had a similar revelation during their final reflections. Earlier in her work with the Health Project, Jessica had expressed reticence to conduct the surveys for them, stating:

We are just some Hispanics chicks, they gonna look at us like ‘little girls, what you want? Why you talking to us about HIV?’ I don’t think we have the authority. Like I wish a THP person would be with us. They’d listen to them.

But her reflection evidenced how she had repositioned her identity as a young Latina as a positive instead of negative. As previously mentioned, Jessica was empowered by the fact that the community *did* take her seriously during their surveying. But the Heath Project subsequently rejected them as volunteers because they were under 18. In her reflection on that rejection, Jessica stated:

That’s like their loss. I mean we are, what was that word, liaisons? We speak the language, we know the culture, we are insiders, yeah like we might get them to talk or listen easier. Because Hispanics are hard, you know, hard to even start the conversation. And being young, maybe it matters, but they did listen to us. Maybe we seemed less threatening being young. I think teens are passionate, energetic. Their loss.

Instead of doubt about her abilities or being taken seriously as a young Latina, Jessica now saw that identity as uniquely positioning her to be successful in this endeavor—it granted her access and gave her cultural and linguistic advantages that other THP employees might not have had.

As previously discussed in the sections on their data collection and analysis, the young men in the Police Brutality group reclaimed successful student identities throughout the project. While reflecting on their action phase, and especially the poetry writing, several of them mentioned how powerful this experience had been for helping them to feel valued and respected in their classroom, which in turn motivated them to

engage academically. Roberto's comment about voice garnered nods and noises of agreement from his group mates:

When we first started this, we were all like, 'Dang, can we really say that with a White lady?' and we'd say 'no offence' all the time to you. But then we kind of got that you wanted us to say what we thought and it made us want to work.

Guillermo agreed:

We got to decide on a lot of stuff, like you'd help us and make connections for us, but you'd follow our lead. Like, I like poetry, so Mrs. Brandon let me do that for my final project. And you didn't just make us do certain things, we got to choose how to do things. It was cool. And so we did them.

In addition to sparking interest that increased motivation and engagement, several students also mentioned how the project changed how they saw themselves as students. When asked what they had learned about themselves through their work on the project, Jason, Carrie, and Roberto said that they learned that they could be leaders in their classes. Guillermo and Jason both learned that they were good collaborators and that they were proud of their research skills. Joaquín learned that he "could actually do the work and do it right." Moreover, as Guillermo stated, "This class was really cool. Like, y'all know I do stuff, like smoke and stuff, but you see me as so much more than that." His comment struck to the core of what the teacher and I were trying to accomplish with this YPAR-guided service-learning project—to see them as "so much more"—and to encourage others in the school and the students themselves to do the same.

Finding the Gaps: Institutionalizing YPAR and Blending it with Service-Learning

Throughout this project, the classroom teacher and I sought to assist these students in repositioning their experiences and knowledge as academically valuable. Based on their ethnicity, socio-economic status, ESOL or former ESOL label, their EC classification, family educational backgrounds, and/or their generally low academic performance elsewhere, I found in my conversations with them that many school adults considered most of these students as “at-risk” of dropping out. They were widely regarded as “lazy” and told they had no ideas of their own by teachers and administrators; they were routinely searched without cause and labeled as “druggies” and “dealers.” Through YPAR, we created a space within the school where they could speak out and back, using academic and content area skills in a way that challenged oppression and discrimination.

But in order to carve out this space, we had to find a way to work within and around the existing systems and structures that regulated the public high school. For example, throughout our YPAR-guided service-learning project, we attended to the required state curriculum for Spanish for Native Speakers II. We supported the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (2014). We created the “evidences” which were used to evaluate the classroom teacher’s “effectiveness” as per the state guidelines. We worked within the boundaries of the district’s service-learning initiative, earning the students service hours that could ultimately count towards district awards and diploma recognitions.

Additionally, we had to attend to the challenges of institutionalizing YPAR, an act that many YPAR researchers and scholars have found difficult. YPAR as a pedagogical method often requires actively countering the traditional school culture. It centers student-led inquiry, values students' home and cultural knowledge and skills, and creates spaces where otherwise marginalized students can take on leadership and participatory roles in their classrooms, schools, and communities (Ozer et al., 2010). These counter-cultural characteristics can obviously rub against what is expected classroom practice in a public school setting, leading to academic, ideological, and practical challenges.

Institutionalizing YPAR: Attending to the Challenges

Pedagogically-speaking, public education is governed by state and district mandates that dictate what and (to an extent) how a teacher may conduct her class. These mandates include curriculum standards, content knowledge/skill requirements, and assessment protocols. Additionally, finding a way to impart the research, literacy, and content area knowledge and skills that students need to conduct YPAR without trampling on YPAR's youth-led dictate requires careful attention (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010). Ideologically-speaking, adults and youth may struggle with the critical orientations that guide YPAR and with its troubling of the teacher-over-student dynamic and its privileging of youth knowledge and decision-making. Moreover, by making YPAR a required part of coursework and attaching grades to it, ethical concerns over coercion vs. liberation may arise (Nygreen, 2010). Practically-speaking, classes in public schools occur within limited timeframes, there are no budgets for resources or materials, and youth must rely on adults/parents for permission to participate and transportation.

Pedagogical and academic concerns. In my work with current and future educators, the most common point of resistance to atypical pedagogy is that state standards will not allow such deviation from the norm. Indeed, if a school has bought packaged/scripted curricula from which teachers may not deviate lest they lose their jobs, I agree that YPAR (or any meaningful pedagogy) may be impossible to implement. However, if the only obstacle is a set of state-mandated standards, such as the nearly-ubiquitous Common Core, YPAR can find its way in.

In fact, our experience indicated that YPAR played well with Common Core. The following standards came from the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy In History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (2014) and were well-supported by our YPAR-guided service-learning project: a) “Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research” (p. 47); “Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation” (p. 46); and c) “Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience” (p. 46).

In addition to the Common Core standards, we were guided by the NC Essential Standards for World Languages (2013). These standards divided World Language course content into four sets of “skills” (cultural competency skills and interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational language skills). These skill sets were to be practiced

through three strands (comparisons, connections, and communities). For example, students would use interpretive language (skill set) to make comparisons (strand) between English and Spanish, their culture and an “American” culture, formal and informal registers, and so on. In addition to this basic framework for language instruction, the NC Essential Standards (2013) also listed specific curricular goals, including: a) “Classify cultural practices of people in the target culture and the students’ culture using familiar topics, situations, and experiences” (p. 24); b) “Understand cultural practices and perspectives from the target culture” (p. 22); c) “Use memorized words and phrases to participate in school or community events related to the target culture” (p. 20); and d) “Use simple phrases and short sentences to describe arts, sports, games, and media from the target culture” (p. 23), for example. Because students were reading, writing, and speaking both informally and “academically” throughout our YPAR-guided service-learning work, we were easily able to attend to these required standards, as well as support the Common Core (a highly encouraged practice regardless of content area). Admittedly, because our state-mandated standards focused on skill development and were quite vague in terms of specific content to be taught, incorporating YPAR into the Spanish for Native Speakers course (and, since they use similar standards, all Spanish courses in our state) may be a more straight-forward task than for other content areas. However, I would argue that it may still be possible. YPAR could easily be themed to reinforce certain content-based points of inquiry like the judicial system, civic participation, race in US History, the environment, health services, or practice with statistics, mathematical modeling, and so on. While it would represent a limitation on

students' choice of topic, such theming is not necessarily in conflict with the student-led dictate in YPAR—most YPAR, whether executed in the community, extra-curricularly, or within fields like social work or health care, is limited by some theming by adult facilitators that occurs prior to the recruitment of youth participants. Rather, by incorporating YPAR into such thematic units, teachers and students may find a way to acquire content knowledge more deeply, critically, and meaningfully than they otherwise would.

In our case, in addition to working within curriculum restrictions and standards, we were able to justify our use of YPAR to the principal and district board governing the use of alternative methods and external research by touting YPAR's academic value, specifically the research, literacy, and content area skills/knowledge that our students acquired through the project. As Ozer and Wright (2012) highlight, through YPAR, students learn research skills, including critically examining sources, reviewing literature, formulating questions for investigation, designing and justifying methods, analyzing data, and presenting findings. Moreover, while learning and practicing these research skills, the students also practice literacy skills, including persuasive writing; informative writing; reading informational texts; detecting bias in texts; and the use of "academic" grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and structure. These skills are applicable and transferable across content areas and are crucial to their future academic success and democratic engagement outside of schooling.

Heeding Bertrand's (2014) advice against leaning too heavily on the academic benefits of YPAR, while we did use them as justifications for the project and attended to

them carefully throughout, we also clearly presented in all communications about the work that, more than just evidencing their academic prowess, the research and literacy skills that students developed would allow them to “think deeply and critically about impediments to their own social and economic progress while developing constituents to help them remove these impediments” (Cammarota & Romero, 2011, p. 496). Thus, not only were the academic skills useful for navigating coursework and success within schooling, but we intended them to be used to support social change in a broader sense. Students engaging in YPAR are meant to contribute to the scholarly and/or policy debates on the issues they examine. The actions and findings of the students we worked with indeed represented attempts at influencing policy, outreach practices, and public debate on the issues they studied.

In sum, academically speaking, we did not find YPAR challenging to implement within a public school curriculum. Rather, we found that the autonomy and cultural relevance that the YPAR framework afforded the students increased their academic engagement and motivation. But embedded in YPAR pedagogy are ideological shifts that can also create obstacles to institutionalizing the practice. In the next section, I explore what ideological conflicts were salient to our work and how we managed them.

Ideological resistance. While we easily mitigated academic concerns about our project, we had to frequently navigate ideological resistance to YPAR’s youth-led dictate and the shifting of traditional power dynamics in the classroom, as well as deficit-oriented assumptions about these students and their abilities.

Throughout the project, and especially initially, we faced some resistance to our work from other school adults, particularly to the notion that we would let the students lead our inquiry process and take an active role in decision-making. Some of this resistance may have been based in racism, as school adults often called these youth “lazy,” “drug dealers,” “pot heads,” and “drop-outs-to-be,” labels that were disproportionately and stereotypically applied to Latin@ students. Exemplifying this resistance, another teacher told me in front of the students that our project wouldn’t work because “These kids have no ideas. They are lazy, *flojo*. You just need to tell them what to do and then ride them.” Luckily, this teacher (and others who expressed similar opinions) had no power to impede our work and the cooperating teacher harbored no such limited expectations, though she did have a tendency to want to steer the groups in certain directions, particularly during the problem-posing phase. Many of our personal communications include reminders from me to “see what they come up with first” or “resist pressuring them to do that [topic] just because we think it would be safer.”

Working through this internal resistance to letting the youth lead required constant reflexivity on our (the adult facilitators) parts. The cooperating teacher and I are former colleague and current friends. Our pre-existing relationship allowed us to honestly critique each other and hold one another accountable when we strayed back into traditional adult-over-youth hierarchies. We also spent an hour and a half together after each session planning future lessons and debriefing from the one that had just occurred. During this time, we reflected on the extent to which we had let the students lead,

thinking through where we had provided the most guidance, why, and whether our interference had been justified.

Foster-Fishman et al. (2010) suggest that finding ways to effectively scaffold youth who have no training in research methods through problem-posing, project design, data collection, analysis, and representation without overrunning YPAR's youth-led directive can be problematic. Keeping these warnings in mind, we carefully considered when, how, and why we would provide direct instruction and when we needed to back off and let the students figure things out. But because YPAR is both a pedagogy and a collaborative research method, we did feel that it was right that we, as co-participants in the project with our own sets of expertise, share that expertise the students, especially when doing so would allow them to more powerfully and effectively share *their* voices and expertise. For example, we realized quickly that our students had little experience generating their own internet search queries, and as such, often became frustrated, either because they could not find what they were looking for or because we would question the reliability of the source they had found. We ultimately decided that they would benefit from guided practice with generating search terms and analyzing the reliability of internet sources. This direct instruction, although initially adult-led, in the end actually allowed the students to take more independent ownership of their research as they no longer needed our input for each internet search or document analysis.

Additionally, Foster-Fishman et al. (2010) posit that YPAR projects often engage youth up through the data collection phase, but the analysis step is skipped, glossed over, or done by the adults. Failing to effectively scaffold youth through their own data

analysis diminishes YPAR's critical pedagogical potential because "this analytic process requires individuals to critically examine assumptions and patterns underlying their data" (p. 75). To alleviate this concern, throughout the data collection, analysis, and reporting phases, we designed graphic organizers that helped the students arrange their thoughts and guided them through these entirely new processes. This passive direct instruction allowed us to scaffold their analysis without contributing too much content of our own.

Before beginning the project, my biggest concern was that the critical and political nature of our work would ruffle too many feathers in the dominantly politically and religiously conservative region of the county in which we were working. I feared parents, students, administrators, and other adult stakeholders' reactions against the kinds of critiques that the students were making, the kinds of change they were seeking, and the critical theoretical frameworks that were guiding our project. As the Social Justice Education Project in Tucson discovered, empowering Latin@ youth to critique their social positioning and issues important to them through a critical lens can result in a powerful backlash (McGinnis & Palos, 2011). However, despite being open about the critical nature of our work, no adult stakeholders complained or challenged us about the ideology underpinning the YPAR project.

In our case, adult resistance with any actual power to derail our work was minor. Instead, the most challenging ideological resistance came from the students whose deeply-seated individualist ideology often ran counter to the ideas we presented (which I discuss in chapters six and seven) and who were more comfortable being positioned as recipients instead of producers of knowledge. As Roberto exasperatedly put it during our

problem-posing phase, “Don’t ask ‘why’ again! Just tell us what you want us to say.”

Well-socialized into the banking method of schooling, they hesitated, particularly in the first phase, to even share their ideas with us, constantly couching their statements in “I don’t know if this is what you’re looking for” or “Is this what you’re thinking?” These frequent attempts to subjugate their ideas to those of the “teacher” represented the deeply-ingrained one-right-answer, youth-as-passive-consumer style of education that they were accustomed to and that we were subverting during the YPAR-guided service-learning project.

Related to this shift in their role in knowledge production, the students also struggled to work outside of traditional adult-youth power dynamics. Nygreen (2010) similarly found that YPAR conducted within institutional settings may limit students’ transformative resistance because participants have difficulty overcoming the traditional constructs of teacher/student. In our case, the students were never comfortable calling me by my first name, preferring to use what they called my “teacher name” (Mrs. Bocci). They were not allowed to call Mrs. Brandon by her first name, per the principal. They expressed surprise the first time we sat in a circle with them and facilitated dialog, assuming that we would stand in front of the class and instruct. It took four sessions together before I noted that they began to talk to one another directly rather than looking to me or Mrs. Brandon to validate their ideas. And it took half of the semester before they relaxed their language around us and stopped freezing in fear of reprisal if they used a “bad” word. Overcoming these traditional dynamics required persistence. For example, when conversation fell silent, we would hold that silence rather than fill it with our own

thoughts until a student was ready to contribute. When students would direct their comments at us rather than the group, we would redirect them, asking their peers to weigh in before we contributed our own thoughts. We did share our thoughts, as we were also participants in the collaborative group, but we made conscious efforts to center the students' voices and were transparent about doing so.

Additionally, the students struggled to trust me as a new adult in their school and a racial outsider to their group. As Guillermo in our second session politely, but pointedly asked, "Don't take this the wrong way, Mrs. Bocci, but why do you, a White lady, want to hear from us? Why are you here talking to us? I mean most people don't really care what we have to say. I've never seen something like this." Overcoming these hesitations required relationship and trust building. We spent the first three weeks feeling one another out and I answered all of their questions, from "What is your code, you know, your philosophy on life?" to "Do you feel oppressed as a woman?" honestly and completely. To their credit, they returned the trust, engaging honestly and openly with me in group dialogs and in journal entries.

Once we entered the research phases of the project, the students were more comfortable engaging with one another as active participants and we all trusted one another more deeply. The activities during these sessions were also inherently more structured, which may have boosted their feelings of personal efficacy as researcher-students. Our sessions during the problem-posing phase had been much more open-ended, the goal being to explore the issue under investigation through dialog and texts. Once the project began, the goals were more concrete (e.g. write your research questions,

justify your data collection methods, write your interview items, etc.) but still academically rigorous. They were still new skills that required scaffolding, but the students seemed more comfortable with those processes than with the open-ended nature of group dialog.

However, students still struggled to believe that we were really affording them the freedom and opportunity to critique the school, their teachers, and other authority figures. For example, throughout the late problem-posing, research design, and data collection phases students repeatedly said “We can’t ask that,” “We gonna get in trouble,” or “Shut up, man, you can’t say that” indicating that they feared the repercussions their critical analysis and honest storytelling could have. Race/ethnicity also limited what they were willing to say in front of me at first, as the Police Brutality group noted how initially they would often repeat “no offense” or “I don’t think we should say this in front of you” before sharing their opinion or finding. Eventually, with repeated assurances from me and as our relationship developed, they let go of some of those hesitations, as evidenced by their reflexivity about having had them in the beginning.

Nygreen (2010) also warns that teachers and students doing YPAR as coursework often have difficulty navigating the coercion/liberation construct. Because the work is mandatory and happening within the school, all parties have difficulty navigating “the apparent paradox between supporting student agency in all circumstances vs. ‘forcing’ students to do work” (p. 259). Traditionally, schools “force” students to work with grades. We stated upfront that the students’ project work would be taken as a “project” grade in the fourth quarter, meaning that for 17 weeks, no grades were used as daily

incentives for work. We had little difficulty navigating the coercion/liberation construct for two reasons. First, because of my involvement as a university researcher, the project was governed by an IRB that required the students be given an alternate assignment if they declined to consent to the study. Four students ultimately chose this option. Thus, no student was actually “required” to do the YPAR-guided service-learning project.

Second, unlike Nygreen, we found that, for most of our students, grades did not motivate their work. For some, they saw success in school as their ticket to a better life and were motivated to work because they have assumed “hard-working” or “good student” as their student identity. Others had internalized grade-based failure as part of their student identities, indicated by statements like Raul’s “I don’t do school” or Joaquín’s “She [former teacher] think we *flojo* and stupid” and Guillermo’s “I always fail all my classes.” Students in both categories did our YPAR work, not because of coercion or grades, but because, in their words, “it is fun,” “we do it because we’re into it,” “we can get our experiences out there,” “it’s my responsibility to show up,” and “we were ESOL kids, so it’s personal.” Throughout the semester, the students embodied their new roles as researchers and took seriously the trust and expectations we had placed on them, though the shift was not immediate. Students needed to figure out that we meant what we said about youth choice and voice, we would follow through and not quit when we hit an obstacle, and we were there to support them no matter what the rest of the school thought of them. We did guide them and remind them to stay on task, but we never had to coerce them to do the YPAR work.

In their ethnography of a course-embedded YPAR project, Phillips et al. (2010) found that taking sufficient time upfront to build relationships and understand the school context was key to cultivating truly collaborative partnerships among all stakeholders which may in turn be a key element to success and sustainability. Across our experience, our relationships did prove central to overcoming our ideological and other challenges. My existing relationship with the cooperating teacher, principal (I taught under her at a different school), and several staff members who were former colleagues afforded me a level of trust and access to the school that I would otherwise not have had. Through these contacts, and because I am a state certified K-12 Spanish teacher, I had several years-worth of background and context knowledge about the school climate, the Spanish program/curriculum, power hierarchies and adult personalities, and the service-learning initiative before I entered. Additionally, the cooperating teacher and I took time to build trust and relationships with the students upfront, though the more time spent in this phase, the better (we only had three sessions dedicated exclusively to relationship-building). These relationships and this insider knowledge contributed to our project's success.

Practical Concerns. As Phillips et al. (2010) posited, relationships were key to navigating the ideological obstacles to YPAR's inclusion in our core coursework. Practical constraints, however, required perseverance and flexibility. Ozer et al. (2010) suggest that large class sizes and/or inadequate space, adult supervision, or time to work in smaller groups and the time and scheduling constraints of trying to work in a class period limit YPAR's feasibility as a classroom pedagogy. Indeed, short timelines and large groups were problematic. If our course had been year-long instead of block, we

would have had more time to build relationships, delve into more theory and scholarship during the literature review process, and take bigger actions in the community. The students' may have experienced more nuanced consciousness-raising or felt more like effective critical change agents with more time in the field. However, we were able to make gains in our 18 weeks together. Students with little experience with academic achievement produced quality research papers and began to see themselves as leaders and successful students. Others began to see their marginalized positions in a positive light, noting that it was that social positioning that gave them a unique perspective and knowledge with which to help others.

Regarding large class sizes, Ozer et al. (2010), in their analysis of characteristics of successful YPAR programs, suggest that limiting the size of the participant group and engaging with them in private locations may positively impact student engagement as it increases their ability to both listen actively and be heard themselves. Our group of 12-14 was never so large as to impede discussion, but breaking into smaller groups after the problem-posing phase did allow for each student to contribute more and actively to the work. We did not separate the groups into private spaces, though the few students in the class not involved in the YPAR work did spend their class time in other rooms (with other teachers) so as to give the groups privacy and full access to the adult facilitators and technology.

The other practical concerns that plagued our group—transportation to action sites, full schedules, absences from school (including several suspensions), and non-existent budgets—are common to all YPAR and service-learning work (and indeed most

community and educational work). As such, rather than propose specific suggestions for overcoming such obstacles, I offer the platitude “where there is a will, there is a way.” Flexibility and ingenuity, and perhaps a few previously cultivated relationships with community organizations, were key to alleviating these practical constraints.

Blending YPAR and Service-Learning

In addition to navigating the conflicts that arose while trying to institutionalize YPAR, this project also represented a merger of two separate pedagogical methods—YPAR and service-learning—which created both challenges to navigate and opportunities to improve the students’ experiences with both practices. YPAR and service-learning have much to offer one another. In this section, I describe the PCS service-learning initiative and how we designed a service-learning project that both operated within the prescribed guidelines and stayed true to the tenets of YPAR.

The district’s service-learning program was considered a best-practice model and had won national recognition from prominent service-learning think tanks for its design. It followed the National Youth Leadership Council’s “Standards for Quality Practice” which included: “meaningful service, diversity, youth voice, progress monitoring, link to curriculum, reflection, partnerships, and duration and intensity” (PCS Service-Learning Handbook, 2014, p. 4). However, the extent to which service-learning in Paul County Schools attended to each of these standards varied greatly between projects. Some of this variance may have been due to the fact that while the handbook required that teachers and students planning service-learning projects “connect” their experience to these

standards (p. 7), specific recommendations about how to do that or what was meant by each standard was left open for interpretation.

In addition to addressing to the NYLC standards, in order to be approved, we had to explicitly outline how the project would align with our course's curricular standards and attend to the required PCS "IPARD" process—Investigation, Preparation and Planning, Action, Reflection, Demonstration. Once the site coordinator and the district service-learning office approved our forms, students received an "opportunity code" which allowed them to officially begin their work and log their hours in an online service-learning tracker.

At first glance, the IPARD process, which was added to the program for the 2014-2015 school year, seemed to readily merge with a YPAR framework since specific importance and credit would now be given for "investigation" prior to the service itself. By adding this investigation piece, PCS also seemed to be opening the door to more meaningful partnerships with community organizations. Instead of students or teachers themselves deciding on an action to take and *then* seeking the partnerships that would support such, there was now an emphasis on "identifying a need or area of interest in their school or community" (p. 7) to be investigated via "research, interviews, surveys, and other tools" (p. 8) seemingly prior to deciding on an action.

However, I quickly realized that the bureaucracy of the practice did not match its intent nor did it mesh easily with YPAR. In YPAR (and in best-practice, *critical* service-learning), the knowledge gained during the investigation phase informs the actions to be taken. One cannot decide on an action prior to researching the issue, forming any

necessary community partnerships (if the YPAR group itself does not constitute that “community”), and collectively deciding on the actions to be taken. To do so would be disingenuous to the call for community engagement. It would imply an assumption that outsider knowledge is more valuable than insider knowledge, that those positioned as “servers” must automatically know more about how to solve the issue at hand, even prior to investigating it, than those for whom it is a lived reality. But, as I discussed in my problem statement and literature review chapters, the prevailing ideology guiding PCS’s service-learning practice was one of neoliberal individualism, and this worldview, which would be unlikely to critically question those assumptions, coupled with the system’s desire to control its students’ and teachers’ actions, meant that the entire IPARD process had to be laid out in detail and approved at the site and district level *prior* to the youth being allowed to start their work. In other words, the person leading the project (be it teacher or student) had to already know the action to be taken, the partnerships that would be formed, and the role each participant would play in the service-learning *before* conducting the investigation, thereby rendering that “investigation” somewhat meaningless, at least in its critical or YPAR sense.

Since without this approval form, students could not get “credit” for their service-learning work, and since we were warned that it was not acceptable to begin any phase of IPARD prior to receiving district approval, we did complete our documentation forms as soon as the students had selected their group topics. Not willing to compromise the tenets of YPAR and critical service-learning best-practices, we used hypothetical examples of service actions we might take and partnerships we might form and repeatedly included

the clause “pending the results of our investigation.” Thankfully, all of our forms were approved and we were able to “legitimately” begin our YPAR work.

However, in order to officially take their actions in the community, the students had to complete another set of forms, which required a “community partner” organization’s information and signatures. For the groups partnered with the immigrant center that ran the Elmwood tutoring program and the Health Project, this was a surmountable hurdle. For the Police Brutality group, however, we had to get more creative. In their case, as in much YPAR, the community serving was the exact same community being served. While their investigations and the impact of their work extended beyond their nuclear group, and while they did work with other members of the community, like the slam poet/activist and a local activist pastor, they were not “partnered” with any official organization or individual. They were working as their own entity. Several teachers with service-learning experience, including the site coordinator, implied that it was not possible to conduct service without an official community partnership, so we ultimately decided that my university, with me as the point person, would go on record as the “partner.” Our form was approved and the students were allowed to log their hours.

We had to get creative again when determining how to categorize the students’ actions so that they would fit the Paul County definition of “service.” Again, the ESOL group’s tutoring easily fit into the prescribed framework for “service,” as did the HIV group’s fundraising work on behalf of the Health Project. The Police Brutality group was harder to classify. They could broadly fit their work into the “Social Justice” category of

“worthy causes” (PCS Service-Learning Handbook, 2014, p. 9), but the handbook specifically forbid students from counting “protests/strikes/rallies” or “work for political...special interests” (p. 10) as service. It also implied that “teaching about an organization or cause” (p. 10) did not qualify (which also potentially disqualified the survey and outreach work the HIV group did on behalf of the Health Project). As such, the Police Brutality group worried that any kind of advocacy or activist work they might do (e.g. attending a board meeting, dialog with community leaders, protesting or rallying, sharing information and calling for changes with their poetry, video, and posters) would not “count” as service. We ultimately decided that both groups would count anything they did that was not explicitly forbidden as their “service.” The online system allowed them to log their hours and I have received no word that they were later rejected.

Throughout the YPAR-guided service-learning project, we played by the rules of the system but consistently privileged YPAR and a critical version of service-learning over the district’s formula. In other words, we molded the system’s framework to fit our needs instead of compromising our YPAR or critical lens to conform to that framework. As such, our investigations did authentically inform the actions we took in the community, despite the approval forms that discouraged such. The partnerships that the students formed in the community were mutually beneficial and also informed by their YPAR work. They were not relationships of convenience formed superficially and without critical engagement. The youth ran the projects from start to finish, and once they selected their topics, the classroom teacher adapted her teaching methods and materials to attend to those topics. She taught her curriculum through the YPAR and service instead

of viewing the service actions as subservient to her curriculum. This orientation allowed for more youth voice in all facets of the classroom, curiosity-led and lateral learning, and authentic and meaningful service actions.

Indeed what YPAR can offer all service-learning is a framework for attending to service-learning best practices that also inherently addresses some scholars and researchers' critiques of the practice—its commonly deficit-based ideology, its service-as-volunteerism or -charity models that perpetuate and/or leave unquestioned structural inequalities (Hyttén, 2008; Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Sheffield, 2011), and its failure to critically and meaningfully engage communities of color (Butin, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2012). YPAR-guided service-learning operates from an asset ideology, and as such respects and seeks to empower participants as critically-conscious change agents in their own communities. In doing so, it avoids the deficit ideology that other service-learning may, perhaps unconsciously, embody. YPAR also encourages critically-conscious action operating on personal, interpersonal, and systemic levels, thereby helping service-learning practitioners avoid the possible pitfalls of service-as-charity or -volunteerism that may perpetuate inequity even as it works to improve conditions. Additionally, YPAR centers and respects the experiences and knowledges of marginalized students, helping it to counter the “pedagogy of whiteness” that may, again perhaps unconsciously, permeate other attempts at service-learning (Mitchell, Donahue, & Young-Law, 2012, p. 612).

YPAR can also benefit from a merger with service-learning. While traditional service-learning is relatively popular in K-16 education, YPAR, likely due to its overt social justice and critical orientation, remains uncommon. Merging the two practices may

serve the dual purpose of bringing a deeper social justice orientation and asset model to mainstream service-learning while also providing more students, particularly those socially positioned as “at-risk” or otherwise marginalized, the opportunity to engage in an educational practice meant to empower, rather than assimilate, them. Indeed, the district service-learning formula’s main contribution to our project was institutional legitimacy. In other words, by housing our work under that highly-promoted and accepted umbrella, we were able to infuse a critical, social justice orientation into a course and classroom practice without as much push-back or risk as we might have otherwise faced. “Service-learning” was a concept that our colleagues, parents, and administrators understood, and so it gave us some cover as we pushed the limits of how much youth empowerment, voice, and truly critical questioning may be allowed in a public school classroom. For us, service-learning represented a crack in the system and we spent the semester working in that crack.

Summary

Like Ozer et al. (2013) and Langhout et al. (2013), we found that our YPAR work, even constrained within layers of institutional regulations (e.g. curriculum, assessment protocols, service-learning guidelines, general school culture), did create a space for fostering agency not found elsewhere in the school. YPAR offered us valuable guidance for overcoming the problematic hierarchies of power and deficit ideology of the district’s service-learning program all while working within it.

In sum, our efforts demonstrated how service-learning and YPAR could inform one another, easing YPAR’s entrance into the school system, offering it some structure in

its action phase, and bringing a critical, asset orientation to service-learning which helped that practice meaningfully and affirmatively engage marginalized youth and communities. Our work also modeled how core classroom teachers seeking an empowering and social justice-oriented practice could successfully navigate the challenges of fully embedding a YPAR-guided service-learning project into their classroom practice. Additionally, our positive student outcomes reinforced the findings of other scholars, practitioners, and researchers that YPAR participation enhances students' senses of autonomy, motivation, and empowerment (Cammarota & Romero, 2011; Irizzary, 2011; Ozer & Wright, 2012) which promotes their academic (re)engagement (Irizzary, 2011; Romero et al., 2008) and can produce positive changes in youth-adult relations through "professionalization" and challenges to deficit ideologies (Langhout et al., 2008; Ozer & Wright, 2012). Centrally to this dissertation, we also found that the students, to varying degrees, developed senses of critical agency throughout their work on the project. In doing so, they were able to both contribute their change-seeking, research-based ideas to broader policy/systems-level discussions about their issues and, in two of the groups, take concrete actions that made a difference in their communities. The following three chapters explore the students' experiences with critical agency in greater detail.

CHAPTER V

POLYVOCAL NARRATIVES

In this chapter I present my polyvocal analysis of the students' experiences with critical agency during our project. In the two chapters following this one, I present my typological analysis of their experience, focusing first on critical thinking and then on agency. Those two chapters will represent *my* voice, how I saw their experiences unfolding. This chapter is meant to present *their* voices. Hatch (2002) describes a polyvocal analysis as a way to create a final text that honors multiple voices and their unique contexts. In YPAR and in critical ethnography, the participants' voices should be centered and respected, not just during the data collection phase of a project, but also in the representation of that data (Cammarta & Fine, 2008; Noblit, Flores, & Murillo, 2004). This chapter is my overt effort to give the students' voices more space and authority and to present to my reader, in the words of my participants, the story of how they experienced critical agency during the project. It is also meant to humanize them for the reader and offer the students a chance to introduce themselves and their lives, particularly the pieces of their identities that most directly influenced how and why they approached our YPAR work. Moreover, while their YPAR findings are referenced in other data chapters, I felt that the students' research outcomes deserved to be directly presented in my dissertation, even though their results were not the focus of my ethnography. As such,

for at least one student in each group, I have woven their YPAR findings into their narrative so that their scholarship may find a wider audience.

Following the steps for polyvocal analysis outlined in the methods chapter, I constructed each narrative by excerpting quotes from their journal entries, class assignments, oral contributions to class discussions (pulled from the transcripts of those audio recordings), and interpersonal communications with me (pulled from text messages and informal conversations as transcribed in my field notes). I chose each quote because of the evidence it presented for how the student thought about their social positioning, how they personally related to or why they chose the YPAR work they did, or the extent to which they felt like critical agents able to act on the systems and structures at play in the issues they were investigating. I then wove each student's selected words together in order to present a distillation of his or her thoughts on their own critical agency. I left out much of what they wrote and said during the semester, and the text here does not necessarily follow the chronological order in which it was originally written/spoken.

These are not *testimonios* in the LatCrit tradition (Huber, 2012). While they are the students' words, they are being filtered through my analytical lens. But, again following Hatch's (2002) steps for polyvocal analysis and attending to the face validity of my work (Lather, 2003), I gave each student the opportunity to edit the narrative I created and to offer their own translation of their Spanish. All of them (except Joey and Raul whose data I used to compose these narratives were all originally in English) returned their translations, but no one requested any substantive changes to the narrative text be made. In an effort to stay as true to the students' voices as possible, I composed the

narrative text in the language in which it was originally presented. I maintained the grammar and spelling used by the student in their original presentation because I felt that adjusting it would diminish its authenticity. When necessary, I provided the students' translation of their text in brackets below the narrative. In the translations, the students largely maintained the punctuation and other style choices as in the original but may have used conventional English grammar or spelling even if the Spanish contained slang or incorrect conjugations or spelling. On occasion, I slightly edited the syntax or word choice within the translation for clarity, and the students approved my edits.

I also included images of drawings or poems that the students produced during our *autorretrato* [self-portrait] project in our first meetings together. I did not include an image for every student, only ones from those who wanted their piece included in its entirety. There is also one QR code that the reader may scan to access the Police Group's video. I chose to include these multimedia texts for three reasons. Primarily, they give additional insights into those students' critical thinking processes. Additionally, they serve as examples of the kind of work we did together as part of the project and give the reader a deeper introduction to several of the participants, which hopefully helps bring more life to my analyses of their experiences.

The narratives vary greatly in length for two reasons. One, the students' voice files contained different amounts and kinds of data. Due to the differences in students' speaking habits during our class conversations, I collected significantly less oral data on some students than on others. Additionally, some students wrote very brief, but often data rich, responses in their journals and on their reflection papers while others wrote more

verbose responses. Absences, tardies, and suspensions also affected the amount and kinds of data I was able to collect on certain students. Thus, while I could still comment on their experiences as a whole, given the depth and breadth of our data collection opportunities, the actual word count varies from student to student. Secondly, some students did participate more fully in the work than other students. For example, María and Carrie were able to consistently tutor at Elmwood, while Juana, Joey, and Ana were not, due to other personal responsibilities and schedule conflicts. Moreover, Juana, while an active contributor during our problem-posing phase and in her first group, never fully engaged with the ESOL group. As such, I collected more data on María and Carrie than on their group mates, as their longer narratives reflect. Additionally, for certain students from each group, I included excerpts from their research reports and reflections in order to present their YPAR findings. I chose these particular students as their groups' representatives because they were the ones who had invested most deeply in the work and participated in every facet of the project. This was not to imply that the other students did significantly less or lower quality work, simply that the voice files of those students who emerged as leaders in their groups and who were perhaps naturally more outspoken than their group mates offered the most detailed descriptions of their groups' findings.

In the following section, I present each student's narrative. In order to preserve the centering of their voices in this chapter, I chose not to include my explications of these narratives here. Instead, I discuss the data they present in the following chapters and briefly summarize it in this chapter's conclusion.

Polyvocal Narratives

Roberto



Figure 1. Roberto's Autorretrato.

Soy Roberto. Soy un junior y tengo 17 años. Nací en mexicano. Nos fuimos de México para libertad, pero todo terminó siendo lo mismo aquí. Pues, para mí, la libertad no significa nada. Pero la justicia es importante. Significa que los malos no sigan sin responder a sus malas obras.

Soy parte del grupo que investiga la brutalidad policial y la discriminación racial. Noto que uno de los problemas más graves en la comunidad es el racismo. Ocurre en la comunidad y en la escuela, pero no he tenido una experiencia personal, pero sé que el racismo corrumpe nuestra sociedad. Los estereotipos afectan que si alguien puede conseguir trabajo o no. Otro ejemplo es que en nuestra escuela existe el school-to-prison

pipeline. Podemos cerrarlo si hablamos sobre los conflictos. También, creo que podemos quitar el racismo por enseñar a la próxima generación que es algo malo. Hay una grande chance que ellos lo pararán. Creo que la educación es importante porque afecta como respondemos a cosas y nuestras opiniones. Conozco a primos y otros que han dejado la escuela, pero yo creo que necesito terminar mi educación para tener un futuro mejor.

Con nuestro proyecto, no me importa personalmente el tema porque no he tenido una experiencia personal con la policía ni con la discriminación racial. Pero me interesa el tema. Lo más importante para mí es que hacemos una diferencia en la comunidad, pero no *debo* tener la responsabilidad de intentar de mejorar el mundo. No debo de arreglar algo malo que yo no hice.

I used to think, like we all have goals, we all trying to achieve them, and just cause we know each other doesn't mean we are going to affect how someone else sees life. We might give opinions and stuff, but that isn't gonna mean he's gonna take it. So I take care of myself. I can't change them. If something's wrong in your life, you are the one who should fix it. You can't force somebody to do something...Even in a utopia...there going to be problems...you can't force people to do things. Pero ahora, no sé, yo en realidad no creo que estoy en cargo de mi propia vida porque todo alrededor de mi afecta como miro el mundo. Yo hago decisiones, pero la gente me ayuda. Nuestro proyecto sirve la comunidad porque estamos hablando sobre la brutalidad de la policía. Spread the word. Tell the story. But it won't take only us to change the system. We need a lot of people, politicians, to agree with us. I can't control the cops' mentality, but

change...that usually take a big movement. And nonviolence takes longer than violence. It might take us a long time.

[I'm Robert. I'm a junior and I'm 17. I was born in Mexico. We left Mexico for freedom, but everything ended up being the same here. So, for me, freedom doesn't mean anything. But justice is important. It means that bad people can't get away without answering for the bad things they've done.

I'm part of the group investigating police brutality and racial profiling. I notice that one of the most serious problems in our community is racism. It happens in the community and the school, but I haven't had a personal experience, but I know that racism corrupts our society. The stereotypes affect who can find a job. Another example is that in our school there is a school-to-prison pipeline. We can close it if we talk about the real conflicts. Also, I believe that we can eliminate racism by teaching the next generation that it is a bad thing. There is a great chance that they will end it. I believe that education is important because it affects how we respond to things and our opinions. I know my cousins and others who dropped out, but I believe that I need to finish my education to have a better future. No one in my family has graduated, and I'm the last one, so I have to do it.

With our project, the theme isn't really important to me personally because I haven't had an experience with the police or racial profiling. But the topic does interest me. The most important thing for me is that we are making a difference in the community, but I don't think that I should have to have the responsibility to try and change the world. I shouldn't have to fix what I didn't break.

I used to think, like we all have goals, we all trying to achieve them, and just cause we know each other doesn't mean we are going to affect how someone else sees life. We might give opinions and stuff, but that isn't gonna mean he's gonna take it. So I take care of myself. I can't change them. If something's wrong in your life, you are the one who should fix it. You can't force somebody to do something...Even in a utopia...there going to be problems...you can't force people to do things. But now, I don't know, in reality I don't think that I'm in charge of my own life because everything around me affects how I see the world. I make decisions, but people help me. Our project serves the community because we are talking about police brutality. Spread the word. Tell the story. But it won't take only us to change the system. We need a lot of people, politicians, to agree with us. I can't control the cops' mentality, but change...that usually take a big movement. And nonviolence takes longer than violence. It might take us a long time.]

Alicia

Me llamo Alicia. Soy un junior y tengo 17 años. Yo soy nacida aqui en los Estados Unidos pero de padres mexicanos. Orgullosamente digo que soy de padres mexicanos. Si tal vez tras generaciones se pierdan las tradiciones, pero siendo chicana—soy mexicana de corazón, soy de aquí en los EE.UU.

I hear the whispers at work, “we’ve got a Mexican waitress.” Nosotros inmigrantes somos tratados diferentes. Libertad significa you have the right to a lot of things. We don't have the same rights as the Americans have that live here or the freedom they have. We are treated differently, los que no tienen papeles. Obviously hay

racism. I'm part of the group looking at police brutality and racial profiling. Our research really interests me, but I am quiet because the boys have more stories to tell. I've never been attacked by the police or searched but I know they have. So I'm listening. And I'm surveying the cops and writing those reports with Roberto.

Nuestra parte de la investigación se trata de que piensen los policías sobre discriminación racial. Las razones por las que nos otros estamos investigando este caso es porque nosotros queríamos agarrar la información sobre cómo se sienten los policías sobre este tema, si creen que es un problema en nuestra comunidad. Hemos investigado ya lo que piensan los maestros y estudiantes sobre esto. La información que recibimos sobre los policías es que ellos opinión lo contrario, que no hay discriminación racial. En la encuesta, los policías generalmente respondieron que mayoría del tiempo, cuando la fuerza es necesario ellos lo usan. En dos de las repuestas ellos dijeron específicamente que solamente lo utilizan cuando una persona está en peligro. En esta pregunta nosotros notamos que los policías tienen sus propias razones para usarla y se sienten libre usarla.

En la segunda pregunta, nosotros les preguntamos a los policías definir la fuerza excesiva. En la mayoría de las repuestas ellos dijeron que es fuerza que se pasan de lo que necesitan. Pero en una de las repuestas, él dijo que se significa cuando los disparas. En todas las repuestas ellos dijeron que la fuerza excesiva no es un problema en nuestra comunidad. Pues, la mayoría de los policías no creen que nuestro tema es un problema. Tampoco la discriminación racial. Nosotros les preguntamos que si han notado discriminación racial en trabajo como policía y ellos respondieron que no ha notado (¡aunque el DOJ lo descubrió en su informe!). Ningún de los oficiales ha oído del

proyecto del ley sobre la discriminación racial que está en la Cámara NC ahora, pero todos dijeron que no es necesario. En todo, notamos que la perspectiva de los oficiales sobre la situación es completamente diferente que la opinión de nuestra comunidad. Esta diferencia va a hacer cambiando la situación más difícil porque es difícil intentar a cambiar un problema si un lado del problema no acepta que el problema existe.

Para mi la palabra justicia significa to punish someone for doing something wrong or reward something good. Getting what you deserve. Mi proyecto relaciona a justicia porque ayuda a la comunidad y a la gente a la que esto ha pasado. Tratamos de cambiar el sistema. Podría ayudar a mejorar el mundo, mejorar situaciones, ayudar a otras gentes. Es mi responsabilidad.

[My name is Alicia. I'm a junior and I'm 17 years old. I was born in the U.S. but of Mexican parents. Proudly I say that I have Mexican parents. Perhaps over generations we will lose our traditions, but being chicana—I am Mexican of heart, I am here in the U.S.

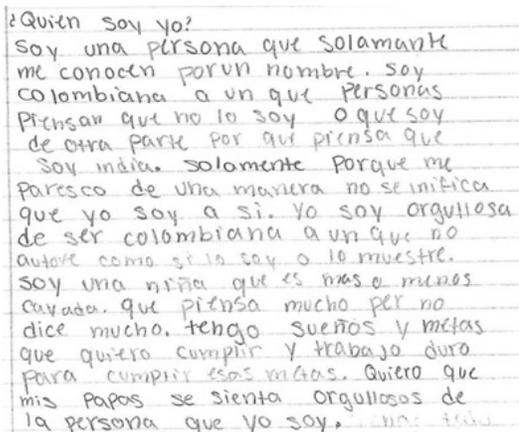
I hear the whispers at work, “we’ve got a Mexican waitress.” We immigrants are treated differently. Freedom means you have the right to a lot of things. We don’t have the same rights as the Americans have that live here or the freedom they have. We are treated differently, the ones with no papers. Obviously there is racism. I’m part of the group looking at police brutality and racial profiling. Our research really interests me, but I am quiet because the boys have more stories to tell. I’ve never been attacked by the police or searched but I know they have. So I’m listening. And I’m writing the reports with Roberto.

Our part of investigation had to do with the police's thoughts about racial profiling. The reasons why we are investigating this is to get information about how the police feel about our topic and if they believe racial profiling is a problem in our community. We have also gathered what teachers and students think about this. The information we received from the police is that they think the opposite, that there is no racial profiling. In our survey, the police generally responded that the majority of the time, when force is necessary they will use it. In two of the answers, they specified that they would only use force if a person was in danger. In this question we noted that the police had their own reasons for using force and felt free to do so.

In the second question, we asked them to define excessive force. In most answers, they said that it was force beyond what was necessary. But in one answer, he said that excessive force meant when you fire your gun. In all the responses, they said that excessive force was not a problem in our community. So, the majority of the cops don't think our topic is a problem. Not racial profiling either. We asked them if they had ever seen racial profiling in their work as police and they responded that they had not (even though the DOJ discovered it in their report!). None of the officers had heard of the bill about racial profiling in the NC House, but they all said that it wasn't necessary. All in all, we noticed that the perspective of the officers about the situation is completely different from the opinion in our community. This difference is going to make changing the situation harder because it is hard to try and change a problem if one side of the issue doesn't accept that the problem exists.

For me the word justice means to punish someone for doing something wrong or reward something good. Getting what you deserve. My project relates to justice because we are helping the community and those people to whom these things have happened. We are trying to change the system. I could help to make the world a better place, improve situations, help others. It's my responsibility to do that.]

Ana



¿Quién soy yo?
 Soy una persona que solamente
 me conocen por un nombre. Soy
 colombiana a un que personas
 piensan que no lo soy o que soy
 de otra parte por que piensan que
 soy india. solamente porque me
 parecen de una manera no se significa
 que yo soy a si. Yo soy orgullosa
 de ser colombiana a un que no
 autole como si lo soy o lo muestre.
 Soy una niña que es mas o menos
 cavada. que piensa mucho per no
 dice mucho. tengo sueños y metas
 que quiero cumplir y trabajo duro
 para cumplir esas metas. Quiero que
 mis papos se sienta orgullosos de
 la persona que yo soy.

Figure 2. Ana's Autorretrato Poem

Soy Ana. Tengo 16 años y soy sophomore. Soy colombiana aunque personas piensan que no lo soy. Me molesta cuando personas dicen que soy mexicana porque hablo español. Soy orgullosa de ser colombiana aunque no lo muestro. Pienso mucho pero no digo mucho. Tengo sueños y metas. Hay mucho problemas en la escuela, drogas, personas no son verdaderos a si mismo, pero no hay manera que yo puedo resolver estos problemas. No es mi responsabilidad de intentar de mejorar el mundo o ayudar sino es algo que todos debemos hacer. Todos debemos de ayudar uno a otro y tratar de mejorar de alguna manera la parte donde nosotros vivimos. Creo que en parte estoy en carga de

mi vida, pero en parte creo que mis padres están porque toman decisiones por mi y tengo que pedir permiso de ellos si voy a hacer algo. Pero soy capaz.

Mi proyecto tiene que ver con los niños en ESOL. Es muy importante poder hablar inglés y ser alfabetizado porque la vida sea más fácil y se puede defenderse mejor en los EE.UU. El problema es que hay muchos niños que no tienen familia que habla inglés. Yo hablo español e inglés. Mis padres y mis maestros en Colombia me enseñaban los dos. No tenía tantas dificultades porque hablamos ambos idiomas cuando vine a los EE.UU. But I understand the struggles. We need English to socially advance, but Spanish helps get jobs, too. And we have to preserve our link to our culture. Doing this project was personally helpful to me because it reminded me where I came from and how far I've come. Our project was good, it made a difference, but we need to take this to the elementary schools. I hope the letter works and they listen to us.

[I'm Ana. I'm 16 and a sophomore. I'm Colombian although everybody thinks I'm not. It annoys me when people say I'm Mexican because I speak Spanish. I'm proud of being Colombian even if I don't show it. I think a lot but I don't say much. I have dreams and goals. There are many problems in my school, drugs, people who aren't true to themselves, but there's no way to solve those problems. It's not my responsibility to try to make the world a better place but rather it is something that we all should do. We all should help one another and try to make the part of the world we live in a better place. I think that I'm partly in control of my life, but partly my parents are because they make decisions on my behalf and I have to ask them permission to do anything. But I am capable.

My project had to do with ESOL kids. It's really important to be able to speak English and be literate because it makes life easier and you can defend yourself better in the U.S. The problem is that many children don't have family here that speak English. I speak English and Spanish. My parents and teachers in Colombia taught me both languages I didn't have as hard a time because we spoke both languages when we got to the U.S. But I understand the struggles. We need English to socially advance, but Spanish helps get jobs, too. And we have to preserve our link to our culture. Doing this project was personally helpful to me because it reminded me where I came from and how far I've come. Our project was good, it made a difference, but we need to take this to the elementary schools. I hope the letter works and they listen to us.]

María



Figure 3. María's Autorretrato.

Me llamo María. Soy una sophomore y tengo 15 años. Cuando era pequeña, a girl told me that she doesn't let my kind touch her stuff because we don't give things back

and we steal. Hay muchas peleas en mi barrio. Y drogas. I can't do anything about these problems because they are too big and dangerous. En la escuela, las maestras siempre buscan drogas en las mochilas de los mexicanos. No buscan a las otras personas. Voy a la escuela para que sea algo. No quiero quedarme en casa no haciendo nada como la gente en mi barrio. Being around them doesn't make me want to be like them. Sometimes people who don't do something, it makes me want to do it. Like graduate. I don't think they have any influence over me.

I also think that we have to keep our Spanish. If you're Mexican you have to know your Spanish. We have to be careful in school because you can't force kids to be something they aren't. But hablar inglés es importante. Yo me enseñé hablar inglés porque cuando era chiquita tenía muchos problemas y no iba a la escuela. Tenía libros en inglés y yo me enseñé poco a poco como pronunciar unas palabras. Quiero ayudar a otros niños en ESOL porque hay otros como yo que necesitan aprender inglés para tener un bueno futuro. Soy como ellos. He tenido un poco de éxito y puedo ayudar a ellos. And I remember how it was, like to have read-alouds and be embarrassed or get Spanish on my homework and feel left out. I can talk to them about that.

Our project at Elmwood was good. We were making a difference, but we need to involve the parents more. Like invite them to sit with us and learn. My dad, he would see me struggle and say "I want to help you but I can't." They would be simple passages. But he couldn't read them. He never could go to PTA or anything. We could do more to help the families and bring the whole communities in to the school. Puedo ayudar a los demás y mejorar nuestra comunidad, pero todo el mundo, eso es mucho.

[My name is María. I'm a sophomore and 15 years old. When I was a little girl, a girl told me that she doesn't let my kind touch her stuff because we don't give things back and we steal. There are a lot of fights in my neighborhood. And drugs. I can't do anything about these problems because they are too big and dangerous. At school, the teachers are always searching the Mexicans' book bags. They don't search anyone else. I go to school so that I can be something. I don't want to stay home and do nothing like the people in my neighborhood. Being around them doesn't make me want to be like them. Sometimes people who don't do something, it makes me want to do it. Like graduate. I don't think they have any influence over me.

I also think that we have to keep our Spanish. If you're Mexican you have to know your Spanish. We have to be careful in school because you can't force kids to be something they aren't. But speaking English is important. I taught myself English when I was little. I had a lot of problems and I didn't go to school. I had English books and little by little I taught myself to pronounce some words. I want to help other kids in ESOL because there are others like me that need help learning English so they can have a better future. I'm like them. I've had a little success and I can help them. And I remember how it was, like to have read-alouds and be embarrassed or get Spanish on my homework and feel left out. I can talk to them about that.

Our project at Elmwood was good. We were making a difference, but we need to involve the parents more. Like invite them to sit with us and learn. My dad, he would see me struggle and say "I want to help you but I can't." They would be simple passages. But he couldn't read them. He never could go to PTA or anything. We could do more to help

the families and bring the whole communities in to the school. I can help others and better our community, but fixing the whole word, that's a lot.]

Juana

Me llamo Juana. Soy una senior y tengo 17 años. Cuando tenía como seis o siete años apenas llegue en este país y empecé a ir a la escuela. Por supuesto no sabía el idioma. Tenía una amiga y cuando hablábamos en español, nos dijeron “talk English because we're in America.” Ahora, no tengo muchos problemas con el racismo, pero recuerdo eso. Y veo el racismo en la escuela. Se dividen entre razas y este causa problemas, líos, peleas. También hay drogas. No puedo cambiar estos problemas porque tendría que cambiar los pensamientos de las personas y todos tenemos diferentes pensamientos. Pero en casos específicos, tengo la fuerza que se necesita para mejorar el mundo. Quiero ayudar a los niños como yo, de ESOL, que necesitan un mentor o tutor.

Como dije, aprendí inglés en el primer grado. Fue duro y difícil porque cinco días de la semana yo tenía que estar con personas a las que no les entendía. ESOL fue la única forma en la que aprendí porque nadie más podía enseñarme. Creo que es muy importante hablar inglés aquí para que se pueda comunicarse, le dé más oportunidades de trabajo. Pero, hay mucha gente en los EE.UU. que no sabe el idioma y ellos trabajan mucho y se comunican como pueden. El español es importante también para comunicar con mi familia y mi gente. Representa mi país.

I couldn't go to the tutoring because I have things to do at home those days and I don't have a ride to go other days. I also sometimes felt left out in the group because of that, like I wasn't making as much of a difference. I think our group did make a

difference for the kids and trying to change bigger things, but me personally, I might not have done as much.

[My name is Juana. I'm a senior and 17 years old. When I was six or seven I had just arrived in this country and started to go to school. Of course I didn't know the language. I had one friend and we were speaking Spanish, they said to us "talk English because we're in America." Now I don't have many problems with racism, but I remember that. And I see racism at school. People divide between races and that causes problems, conflicts, fights. There are also drugs. I can't change these problems because I'd have to change people's thoughts and we all have different thoughts. But in specific cases, I have the strength that is needed to make the world a better place. I want to help children like I was, ESOL, that need a mentor or tutor.

Like I said, I learned English in first grade. It was hard work and very difficult because five days of the week I had to be with people that I couldn't understand. ESOL was the only way for me to learn because no one else could teach me. I do think that it is very important to learn English here so that you can communicate, it gives you more job opportunities. But, there are a lot of people in the U.S. who don't speak the language and they work hard and communicate as best they can. Spanish is important too for communicating with my family and my people. It represents my country.

I couldn't go to the tutoring because I have things to do at home those days and I don't have a ride to go other days. I also sometimes felt left out in the group because of that, like I wasn't making as much of a difference. I think our group did make a

difference for the kids and trying to change bigger things, but me personally, I might not have done as much.]

Guillermo



Figure 4. The Police Brutality Group's [Youtube Video](#).

Soy Guillermo. Tengo 15 años. Soy sophomore. Soy mexicano 100% y sin el español yo no me sintiera completo. Español es importante porque es mi cultura. Así se comunicaron mis ancestors. Si yo dejara el español, es como si tuviera vergüenza de mis raíces. El inglés te da oportunidades aquí, pero guardo mi español. Aprendí inglés cuando era joven. No fue tan difícil porque tengo dos hermanos mayores. Ellos me hablaban en inglés.

But my Spanish and my skin color are liabilities. At school it seems like the darker your skin color, the harsher your punishment. School is supposed to put education first, but lately they never hesitate to suspend you for the most minor offences. Shouldn't they want the students here and not at home? I know I'm not totally innocent all the time, but it seems like my side never gets heard, like they don't really care about what happens to me. Nos culpan por delitos que no hemos cometido. En los EE.UU. la raza mexicana es culpada por muchas cosas malas. Sin conocernos nos juzgan. En mi barrio, aun cuando era joven, el policía pasa y nos da miradas llenas de odio. Nos dice nombres que yo le

diría a mis enemigos. Nunca entendía, pero poco a poco eso me reconoce el color de mi piel. Noté que si era su enemigo, su enemigo a causa de mi raza. Por estas experiencias, trabajo con el grupo que investiga la brutalidad policial y la discriminación racial.

Police brutality and profiling happen because they get away with it and they know they will because it is too hard to make complaints. They need to have like a central way to make complaints and it needs to not be through the cops. Now you have to send it to the cops individually and its complicated and it goes through so many channels that by the time it gets around its changed and plus the cops can investigate themselves, like complaints against themselves. That's messed up. Like if someone complains about me and I get to be the one who investigates that complaint. Crazy. Also, it is a mix of racism and power. The way I see it, the cops see themselves above civilians. Like when a cop gets shot they going to jail, the rest don't matter, but a cop shoots someone else, he's a hero automatically. Different starting assumptions.

We need to change things. We can by like raising awareness, but like the cops still, like they've got to make a change within themselves. The chief needs to keep better tabs and he needs to have an open mind about our ideas, like the camera thing and the centralizing complaints. And police, have a conversation instead of resulting in violence. And even when shooting is "justified" was that really the only way? Like how can you know what the real situation is all the time right when you roll up. Like the kid with the airsoft gun. They should go up ask more questions. And we need to have dialogs, but like the police have to mean it, like really want to hear. I ain't never had a cop come up to me and just wanna talk. Like, "how's your day?" Dialog is good, but good faith effort, right?

Y solo pueden ocurrir si la gente se siente seguro y protegido y no tiene miedo de castigo por sus opiniones. Can we really change it? I'd talk to people, make posters and spread the word, but I can't really change them personally till they change themselves. But the system and structure stuff, like policies, that could change, but they have to want to do it. But nothing ever changes without a force. A spark or something. Maybe that's our role.

[I'm Guillermo. I'm 15. I'm a sophomore. I'm 100% Mexican and without Spanish I wouldn't feel whole. Spanish is important because it's my culture. It's how my ancestors communicated. If I lose Spanish, it would be like I was ashamed of my roots. English is important because it gives you opportunities here, but I keep my Spanish.

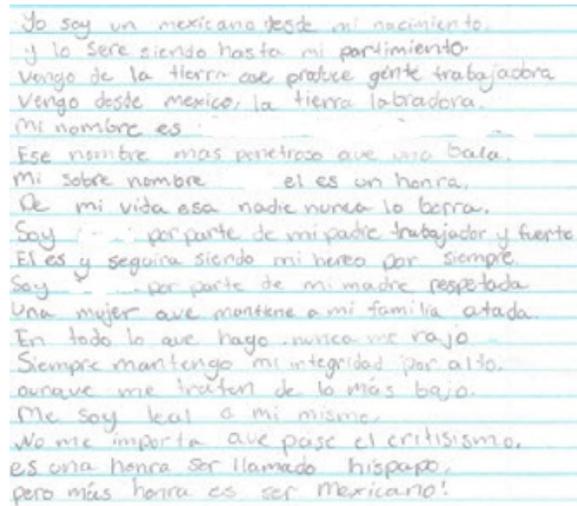
But my Spanish and my skin color are liabilities. At school it seems like the darker your skin color, the harsher your punishment. School is supposed to put education first, but lately they never hesitate to suspend you for the most minor offences. Shouldn't they want the students here and not at home? I know I'm not totally innocent all the time, but it seems like my side never gets heard, like they don't really care about what happens to me. We get blamed for crimes we didn't commit. In the U.S. the Mexican race is blamed for many bad things. Without knowing us, they judge us. In my neighborhood, even when we were kids, the police go by and throw hateful looks at us. They call us names that I would call my enemies. I never understood, but little by little I recognized the color of my skin. Realized that I was their enemy, their enemy because of my race. Because of these experiences, I'm working with the police brutality and racial profiling group.

Police brutality and profiling happen because they get away with it and they know they will because it is too hard to make complaints. They need to have like a central way to make complaints and it needs to not be through the cops. Now you have to send it to the cops individually and its complicated and it goes through so many channels that by the time it gets around its changed and plus the cops can investigate themselves, like complaints against themselves. That's messed up. Like if someone complains about me and I get to be the one who investigates that complaint. Crazy. Also, it is a mix of racism and power. The way I see it, the cops see themselves above civilians. Like when a cop gets shot they going to jail, the rest don't matter, but a cop shoots someone else, he's a hero automatically. Different starting assumptions.

We need to change things. We can by like raising awareness, but like the cops still, like they've got to make a change within themselves. The chief needs to keep better tabs and he needs to have an open mind about our ideas, like the camera thing and the centralizing complaints. And police, have a conversation instead of resulting in violence. And even when shooting is "justified" was that really the only way? Like how can you know what the real situation is all the time right when you roll up. Like the kid with the airsoft gun. They should go up ask more questions. And we need to have dialogs, but like the police have to mean it, like really want to hear. I ain't never had a cop come up to me and just wanna talk. Like, "how's your day?" Dialog is good, but good faith effort, right? And it can only occur if the people feel safe and protected and are not afraid of punishment for their opinions. Can we really change it? I'd talk to people, make posters and spread the word, but I can't really change them personally till they change

themselves. But the system and structure stuff, like policies, that could change, but they have to want to do it. But nothing ever changes without a force. A spark or something. Maybe that's our role.]

Jason



Yo soy un mexicano desde mi nacimiento,
y lo sere siendo hasta mi partimiento.
Vengo de la tierra que produce gente trabajadora
Vengo desde Mexico, la tierra labradora.
Mi nombre es :
Ese nombre mas penetra que una bala,
Mi sobre nombre el es un honra,
De mi vida esa nadie nunca lo borra.
Soy ... por parte de mi padre trabajador y fuerte.
El es y seguira siendo mi herero por siempre.
Soy ... por parte de mi madre respetada.
Una mujer que mantiene a mi familia atada.
En todo lo que hago nunca me rajo.
Siempre mantengo mi integridad por alto,
aunque me traten de lo más bajo.
Me soy leal a mi mismo.
No me importa que pase el criticismo,
es una honra ser llamado hispano,
pero más honra es ser Mexicano!

Figure 5. Jason's Autorretrato Poem.

Soy Jason. Tengo 16 años. Soy sophomore. Es una honra ser mexicano aunque la gente lo usa como una palabra mala. Yo asisto a la escuela para hacer mis padres orgullosos. Quiero ser el primer graduarme de la escuela e ir a la universidad y que mis hermanos me vean como un ejemplo. Soy buen estudiante, pero ellos me han buscado. No encontraron nada porque no vendo ni tomo drogas, pero fui el único mexicano hablando con algunos de mis amigos afroamericanos y por eso ellos crearon que estaba vendiendo drogas. Pero no me voy a dar por vencido sino seguiré hasta donde no pueda más.

Yo tengo la responsabilidad de intentar ayudar a la gente, pero no de todo el mundo porque va de mal a peor. Quiero ayudar a los mexicanos ahora porque ellos son mi gente. La palabra justicia significa tener derechos iguales para todos sin importar la raza, el color, el sexo. Todos somos humanos y somos iguales. Soy parte del grupo investigando la brutalidad policial y la discriminación racial. Mi proyecto tiene todo que ver con la justicia social porque la justicia es que todos deberíamos ser tratados iguales y ser protegidos. Esto es nuestra lucha.

Hicimos investigaciones tratándose de racial profiling y brutalidad policial en Carolina de Norte. Queríamos saber que es lo que la gente piensa sobre la policía y nos lanzamos a hacer una entrevista preguntándole a la comunidad lo que sabe. Preguntamos a estudiantes Latinos y Latinas en nuestra comunidad. Aprendimos que las personas no quieren la brutalidad de la policía sino sentirse seguros y protegidos. Una persona cuenta que no se siente cómodo con la policía cuando esta cerca de su casa o cuando un policía está cerca de ellos. También una persona dice que el departamento de policía tiene mucho poder en los Estados Unidos. La policía no sabe tratar con la gente cuando se trata de violencia. Cuando la policía no reacciona con respeto la gente tampoco y por eso ocurren las matanzas y conflictos. Muchas personas no tienen confianza con la policía por las cosas que miran en la televisión. Y por las cosas que ven en las calles y también lo que experimentan. La policía no se está ganando la confianza de su comunidad.

También, leímos mucho sobre la situación. Lo que hemos encontrado en la revisión de esta información es que muchas de las personas en Paul Town han perdido confianza en la policía. En muchos casos la policía nunca responde a las llamadas de los

ciudadanos. Toman más tiempo en cubrir sus errores que en tratar de componerlos. A veces hacen arrestos enjuiciables sin pruebas de que un delito fuera cometido. El jefe de la policía en PTPD le respondió a un ciudadano pidiendo una investigación de uno de estos casos con un e-mail muy derogatorio y rechazo su necesidad de ayuda. Otro ejemplo que yo leí fue el caso de dos estudiantes morenos que fueron encarcelados por toda la noche sin pruebas, sin receiver ningún ticket, ofensa de tráfico, o sin que les hicieran una sola pregunta. ¡La justicia se está yendo para abajo!

¿Qué podemos hacer para cambiar esta situación? Oficiales no deberían de tener el derecho de investigar quejas sobre ellos mismos. Deberían ser tratados como ciudadanos comunes. Otro consejo es la idea de cameras que se pegan al cuerpo de un oficial. Las cameras pueden captar todo lo que el oficial ve y ya nunca habrá dudas sobre como usa su poder de policía. También los oficiales deberían ser más organizados y tiene que haber mucha más comunicación entre policías. El jefe de policías tiene que tomar su trabajo más serio y dejar los abusos de poder y tomar su papel de jefe como una persona honorable y no como cobarde en estos casos escondiéndose de tras de su placa. Otra necesidad es la idea de tener reuniones u oportunidades para la comunidad y la policía hablar sobre los conflictos e intentar a resolverlos juntos. Pero la gente necesita sentirse seguro estar en frente de la policía. La policía y la comunidad tienen que construir una relación de confianza y respeto mutual.

Overall I think the cops feel threatened by Black and Latino people. They think people of color are going to go against them and they take actions first. We feel the same way about them. We are trying to solve the problem, work on bigger levels. It's like no

one trust anyone. Building relationships. That might be the solution. Maybe we are part of that.

[I'm Jason. I'm 16. I'm a sophomore. It is an honor to be Mexican although people use that like it's a bad word. I go to school to make my parents proud. I want to be the first to graduate from school and go to college and for my siblings to see me as an example. I'm a good student, but they have searched me. They didn't find anything because I do not sell or do drugs, but I was the only Mexican talking to some of my African American friends and because of that they thought I was selling drugs. But I'm not going to give up but rather keep going till I can't do anymore.

I have a responsibility to try to help people, but not the whole world because it's going from bad to worse. I want to help Mexicans now because they are my people. The word justice means to have equal rights for all people regardless of race, color, or sex. We are all humans and are equal. I'm part of the group investigating police brutality and racial profiling. My project has everything to do with social justice because justice means that we should all be treated equally and protected. This is our struggle.

We did an investigation about racial profiling and police brutality in North Carolina. We wanted to know what people thought about the police so we went out into the community to do an interview about what they know. We asked Latino students and Latinos in the community. We learned that people don't want all this brutality, but to feel safe and protected. One person told us that they don't feel comfortable when police are near their house or around them. Another person talked about how the police in the U.S. have a lot of power. The police don't know how to treat people, so they treat them with

violence. When the police don't react with respect, the people don't either and this leads to killings and conflicts. Many people have lost their trust in the police because of what they've seen on TV, and because of the things they've seen in their streets and their personal experiences. The police are not winning the trust of their communities.

We also read a lot about this situation. What we found in our review of that information was the same, people in Paul Town have lost faith in their police. In many cases, the police did not respond to their citizens' calls. They spend more time trying to cover their mistakes and trying to fix them. There have also been cases of unjust arrests where no charges were filed and no crimes committed. The chief of police responded to one citizen's request for an investigation of one such incident with a very derogatory email and rejected their need for help. Another example I read was the case of two Black students who were jailed overnight without charges, without receiving a ticket, traffic offense, and without being asked a single question. Justice must rise up from the bottom!

What can we do to change this situation? The officials should not have the right to investigate complaints against themselves. They should be treated like citizens in these cases. Another suggestion would be to have cops wear body cameras. The cameras can capture everything the officer does and there wouldn't be any doubt about how they use their force. Also, the officers need to be better organized and there needs to be much more communication between officers. The chief of police needs to take his role more seriously and stop the abuses of power and be a more honorable chief and not a coward in confronting these cases hiding behind his badge. Another need is the idea of having meetings or opportunities for the community and the police to talk about their conflicts

and try to solve the problems together. But the people will have to feel safe being in front of the police. The police and community need to build a relationship of trust and mutual respect.

Overall I think the cops feel threatened by Black and Latino people. They think people of color are going to go against them and they take actions first. We feel the same way about them. We are trying to solve the problem, work on bigger levels, but we don't want to talk to the SRO 'cause it's too personal. It's like no one trust anyone. Building relationships. That might be the solution. Maybe we are part of that.]

Joey

I'm Joey. I'm 16 and a sophomore. One time, my friend and I were hanging out and all of a sudden the officer comes up and takes us to the office because he automatically assumed that we had weed on us. Another time we were all taken to a room, a bunch of us Mexicans, for a test. But really they had just rounded us up to search for drugs. They had a police dog and everything. They found a grinder in one bag but nothing else. The SRO is always giving me nasty looks in the morning when I come in. Students do any little thing and the teachers automatically send them to the office if they don't like the student. It happens to me all the time. I don't think I can change these problems because I can't change the way look and I can't change the way people think. I do think that I could change the world by like building a building or something or teaching people, but not really *changing* the world because the world will never change.

My mom influences me to stay in school. I see her work and it makes me want to work. She keeps me strong. I was born here, but I learned Spanish growing up with my

family and English in school, but I don't feel like speaking Spanish much. But it is best to know both English and Spanish because there are many jobs that hire translators. I'm working with the ESOL group. I think I get what justice means, fairness, but I don't see how it relates to the project we are doing.

I couldn't work on the tutoring because I have to watch my little sister and brother after school. I feel like I'm their mentors, so I get everything the ones who tutored are saying. I wish I had that growing up. My parents don't speak English well. Like my mom...she wants to learn English. I have to translate for her all the time. It kinda makes me feel powerful, like I know more than them. But it makes them feel bad. Mom wants to learn, but can't find the time and stuff. I guess the language barrier got in the way of my parents being involved in school. That's why I think we need to do this project full out and get the families and teachers and everyone involved. Like ESL for parents too. They really want to help, like every Mexican family I know, they really want their kids to do good in school, but they feel like they can't help.

Joaquín

Soy Joaquín. Tengo 15 años. Soy sophomore. I am working with the police brutality and racial profiling group. I have not had any big experiences with racism, just little things. But I have seen racism in other places to other people. And stereotypes. Un problema en la escuela es el conflicto entre los estudiantes y los maestros. They don't want to struggle with the kids so they suspend them. Pero también no hay peor ciego que el que no quiere ver. Pues, se puede tratar de cambiar el mundo, pero no puedo ayudar si otros no quieren ayudar a si mismo. It doesn't get better. It's all on people. No one can

change these problems. Hay algunas cosas afuera de mi alcance. La idea de depender en alguien para resolver tus problemas, eso no es la vida. Yo me siento en cargo de mi vida. Like our parents, they came here. They brought us here for better things, you gotta think about that. They brought us to this country to have a better future, you gotta go ahead and have it. Most people forget it and go for the money instead of that example.

I don't know if our work did anything. Like if we had lots more time, maybe. But it feels like spreading the word and telling our side of things, I'm not sure it matters. But I do think we are part of a movement, like all the stuff that happened while we were doing this, it was like a new incident every week. And people and the government are talking about fixing things. It was cool that the stuff we said needed to happen was the same thing the government said about, um, Baltimore? So that was cool and made us feel like we were having good ideas. But did our work actually *change* something. No. Is the stuff in Baltimore gonna change? No. Not until the people change inside themselves.

[I'm Joaquín. I'm 15 and a sophomore. I am working with the police brutality and racial profiling group. I have not had any big experiences with racism, just little things. But I have seen racism in other places to other people. And stereotypes. One problem in the school is the conflict between teachers and students. They don't want to struggle with the kids so they suspend them. But there is also no worse blind man as the one who refuses to see. So, you can try to change the world, but I can't help if others don't want to help themselves. It doesn't get better. It's all on people. No one can change these problems. There are some things out of my reach. The idea of depending on someone else to solve your problems, that's not life. I feel in control of my own life. Like our parents,

they came here. They brought us here for better things, you gotta think about that. They brought us to this country to have a better future, you gotta go ahead and have it. Most people forget it and go for the money instead of that example.

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Jessica

Yo vengo de una familia de circo. mi mamá
mi papá. y mis dos hermanos mayores y yo.
Gracias a mi padre. yo soy la única que
nacío en los estados unidos. Aunque no nací
en México todavía me considero Mexicana.
Yo admiro mucho a mi hermano de
23 años porque él sufre mucho aunque se
salio de la escuela. Ahora él tiene su familia
y un buen trabajo. Gracias a mi hermano
aprendí ser como soy. Si soy penosa, pero
solo si no te conozco o no te quiero conocer.
Me gusta estar alrededor de la gente
que es feliz y que me hace feliz. Aunque
no hablo mucho, si soy una persona
que me gusta sonreír. Yo soy orgullosa
de como soy y de donde vengo. En conclusión
yo quiero a mis padres y mis mejores
amigos son mis hermanos y eso
es todo lo que necesito en
la vida para
Sobrevivir.

Figure 6. Jessica's Autorretrato Poem.

Me llamo Jessica. Soy 16 y una sophomore. Soy la única de mi familia que nació en los EE.UU. Aunque no nací en Mexico, todavía me considero mexicana. I look White, so people say I am White because I have White skin. But I know who I am. It's hard to be friendly with White people sometimes. Hay varios problemas en la escuela, la gente habla mucho de otra gente, el peer pressure, el bullying. Tambien, hay problemas racistas. La gente no es directa pero todavía lo piensan. Yo también. No hay una solución que yo puedo hacer para cambiar a la gente. La gente hace lo que quiere.

No creo que tengo el deber o la responsabilidad de hacer una diferencia, pero si puedo porque quiero pero no porque tengo que hacerlo. Ayudo para sentirme bien o para hacer a alguien sentirse bien. También, lo hago para no ser mala persona y para poder decir "yo ayudé a alguien en mi comunidad."

When we work with The Health Project we make a difference because with the money we raise they can buy supplies. I guess we also help make a difference by spreading the word about HIV and the resources to stop it to our peers and community, but it doesn't feel like that's really doing anything concrete. Same with the surveys we did. I guess we are making a contribution by gathering information, but it doesn't feel as impactful as giving money. But it was easier to do the survey than ask for money. The survey made us feel professional and it was easier to talk to people. I felt silly asking for money. Some of the questions on the first survey, people didn't give very detailed answers. We still had some yes/no ones on there. We needed to reword and try those again. And we could ask about our ideas for outreach, whether they think they would help. Like we wondered if putting up Spanish-language posters about HIV prevention

and testing in places that people would see them—would that get the word out or would they find it inappropriate? And because people were really willing to talk to us, we wondered if having people like us, you know, do the outreach, if that would help. Were people more willing to talk to some Spanish-speaking teen girls than maybe other, older people who aren't part of their community. And we thought about talking specifically to women and teens about how to talk about safe sex and what options there were for protection and testing so that they can protect themselves even if parents aren't sharing that kind of information.

We learned that the hardest part is getting the community's attention. Like they don't think about protection like that, like they don't talk about HIV. It's more about pregnancy, prevent pregnancy. Period. They don't inform their kids. They don't go deep. The common thread was parents won't talk to their kids about HIV. Or that they think you can't get HIV if you're married. And like, machismo. They think, Mexican men think HIV won't happen because they don't get around those people, only gay people get infected. And girls, so they've been raised like boys are strong and the conversation about HIV never comes up. Because the conversation before sex doesn't come up. It's just "you've got a wrap, I don't want to get pregnant?" Most of them also weren't sure how you could get tested for HIV.

So it was social, but also personal. What I learned about HIV, it helps me in my life, like you know. Like, I will always use protection, and not just because I don't want to get pregnant. Also, I felt really...I guess...professional...handing out the information and conducting the survey. Like people took us seriously. And THP, they valued our

Spanish and our cultural connection, like we were liaisons to our people. And doing the whole project ourselves, that was really motivating and interesting. School needs to be more like that. The experience was good because it helped me learn that this world is not easy and you have to work really hard even for small things. We had to get the guts to go up to people and be brave. Aprendí que soy muy creativa y puedo hacer planes inteligentes.

We should be able to pick more what we take in school. It would be more interesting. Like the only thing they say is, pay attention so you graduate, but there should be more to it than that. Like what happens after you graduate? School gets pointless when it is all about graduate, graduate, job, job. Like I was so scared when my brother dropped out that he was going to have a terrible life. But he is doing better than the one who graduated. So the graduate thing, we don't go to school to learn anymore, it's just something you have to do. I feel like school is important but not the most important. There are other things that make success in life. School doesn't really make you a whole person. I felt like this did more to make me a whole person and give me life experience. Pudimos ayudar a la comunidad Latina no solo pensar en la educación de nosotros.

The word justice means to me that everyone is treated equally and fairly. To create justice, everyone gets a chance to say what they need to say and do what they need to do to get their life together. I don't think that our work with The Health Project has anything to do with justice. But it was important.

[My name is Jessica. I'm 16 and a sophomore. I am the only one in my family born in the US. Although I wasn't born in Mexico, I still consider myself Mexican. I look White, so people say I am White because I have White skin. But I know who I am. It's hard to be friendly with White people sometimes. There are some problems in our school, people talk about other people, peer pressure, bullying. Also, there are problems with racism. People aren't direct about it, but they think it. I do too. There's no solution that I can work on to change people. People do what they want.

I don't think that I have the responsibility to make a difference, but I can if I want to, but not because I have to. I help to feel good about myself and to make others feel good. Also, I do it so that I'm not a bad person and so that I can say "I helped someone in my community."

When we work with The Health Project we make a difference because with the money we raise they can buy supplies. I guess we also help make a difference by spreading the word about HIV and the resources to stop it to our peers and community, but it doesn't feel like that's really doing anything concrete. Same with the surveys we did. I guess we are making a contribution by gathering information, but it doesn't feel as impactful as giving money. But it was easier to do the survey than ask for money. The survey made us feel professional and it was easier to talk to people. I felt silly asking for money. Some of the questions on the first survey, people didn't give very detailed answers. We still had some yes/no ones on there. We needed to reword and try those again. And we could ask about our ideas for outreach, whether they think they would help. Like we wondered if putting up Spanish-language posters about HIV prevention

and testing in places that people would see them—would that get the word out or would they find it inappropriate? And because people were really willing to talk to us, we wondered if having people like us, you know, do the outreach, if that would help. Were people more willing to talk to some Spanish-speaking teen girls than maybe other, older people who aren't part of their community. And we thought about talking specifically to women and teens about how to talk about safe sex and what options there were for protection and testing so that they can protect themselves even if parents aren't sharing that kind of information.

We learned that the hardest part is getting the community's attention. Like they don't think about protection like that, like they don't talk about HIV. It's more about pregnancy, prevent pregnancy. Period. They don't inform their kids. They don't go deep. The common thread was parents won't talk to their kids about HIV. Or that they think you can't get HIV if you're married. And like, machismo. They think, Mexican men think HIV won't happen because they don't get around those people, only gay people get infected. And girls, so they've been raised like boys are strong and the conversation about HIV never comes up. Because the conversation before sex doesn't come up. It's just "you've got a wrap, I don't want to get pregnant?" Most of them also weren't sure how you could get tested for HIV.

So it was social, but also personal. What I learned about HIV, it helps me in my life, like you know. Like, I will always use protection, and not just because I don't want to get pregnant. Also, I felt really...I guess...professional...handing out the information and conducting the survey. Like people took us seriously. And THP, they valued our

Spanish and our cultural connection, like we were liaisons to our people. And doing the whole project ourselves, that was really motivating and interesting. School needs to be more like that. The experience was good because it helped me learn that this world is not easy and you have to work really hard even for small things. We had to get the guts to go up to people and be brave. I learned that I can be very creative and make intelligent plans.

We should be able to pick more what we take. It would be more interesting. Like the only thing they say is, pay attention so you graduate, but there should be more to it than that. Like what happens after you graduate? School gets pointless when it is all about graduate, graduate, job, job. Like I was so scared when my brother dropped out that he was going to have a terrible life. But he is doing better than the one who graduated. So the graduate thing, we don't go to school to learn anymore, it's just something you have to do. I feel like school is important but not the most important. There are other things that make success in life. School doesn't really make you a whole person. I felt like this did more to make me a whole person and give me life experience. We could help the Latino community and not just think about our own education.

The word justice means to me that everyone is treated equally and fairly. To create justice, everyone gets a chance to say what they need to say and do what they need to do to get their life together. I don't think that our work with The Health Project has anything to do with justice. But it was important.]

Carrie

autorretrato
 MIS ojos son oscuros, como
 la noche, mi cuerpo no
 es flaco pero tampoco
 me sobra, mi corazón es
 grande y mi cariño mas,
 Soy amante de los sueños
 aunque la gente me dice
 que no llegare. Me dicen
 que sere como mis
 hermanos. Aunque yo se
 que no. Sere abogada y
 les enseñare a todos que
 yo si puedo, le dare a
 mi hermana un ejemplo a
 quien admirar y tambien
 a mis sobrinos. Yo voy
 hacer abogada

Figure 7. Carrie's Autorretrato Poem

Soy Carrie. Tengo 16 años. Soy sophomore. Las problemas sociales que veo en mi comunidad son el racismo y la separación entre la gente por los clases sociales. No pienso que estos problemas pueden resolver porque uno no puede cambiar como la gente piensa totalmente. If he's doing something wrong and I'm doing something right and I come up to him and be like, "you shouldn't do that," he isn't going to listen to me.

No creo que la gente en tu barrio tiene nada que ver con tus pensamientos. Because if I'm surrounded by people who didn't graduate, why wouldn't I want to? Quiero graduarme porque mis hermanos no acabaron la escuela. Quiero ser mejor que ellos y enseñar a todos que no voy a hacer como ellos. You have to try to better yourself, aim for the better life than your parents have.

Aprendí español de mis padres y el inglés en la escuela. My older siblings weren't much help to me. Like my dad always tells my little sister to ask me because I've been there, and I didn't have no one to ask when I was a kid. Like Dad couldn't help and my older siblings were not graduating and they barely made it out, like sometimes I'd ask my sister-in-law, but really it wasn't much help. But I think it is important that the school help us learn Spanish too, not the basic stuff, but like culture and real language stuff. I feel like we are losing our culture if we don't speak the language. You can't take what they know, what all they know and then...expect them to be successful in school. And involving parents more. It is so true that they want to help but don't think they can. Like the parents at Elmwood, they are there, but maybe they don't feel comfortable. We need to invite them over to sit with us and help the kids with us.

I love helping the kids, especially with their math. I taught this one girl a trick for dividing and she was like, "that's amazing." It made me feel like I had really done something. We can relate to these kids well and communicate completely with their parents because we are just like them. Yo pienso que si tengo la responsabilidad de mejorar el mundo. Next year we could continue if they let us and change the rules!

We wrote this letter to try to persuade them:

Queridos maestros y administradores,

Somos un grupo de estudiantes en GHS y este semestre participamos en un proyecto de servicio-aprendizaje sobre las experiencias de estudiantes en ESOL. Queremos compartir con Uds. los resultados de nuestro proyecto y ofrecer una recomendación para el futuro.

Para entender mejor la situación, hicimos una encuesta de los maestros de ESOL en PCS y entrevistas con anteriores estudiantes de ESOL. En la encuesta, aprendimos que, en la opinión de las maestras, los estudiantes se esfuerzan para entregarse en dos culturas. También, los niños lucharon para hacerse una vida mejor. Uno de los obstáculos más grandes es que los niños no entienden la academia y como navegarla y que se atrasan en los estudios mientras están tratando de aprender inglés. En las entrevistas, aprendimos que los anteriores estudiantes de ESOL que lucharon menos con sus experiencias fueron los que tenían hermanos mayores que los podían ayudar. Fue beneficioso tener alguien mayor que habla inglés y tiene experiencia con el sistema de educación estadounidense porque esta persona puede facilitar la comunicación entre la familia y la escuela, ayudar al estudiante con su tarea y con su inglés, y también dar consejos sobre ser parte de dos culturas. Los estudiantes sin este apoyo en casa tenían muchos más dificultades.

Pues, es nuestra recomendación que en el futuro, sería bueno si los anteriores estudiantes de ESOL en GHS y GMS pudieran trabajar como tutores y mentores para los estudiantes de ESOL más jóvenes en GHS, GMS, y las escuelas primarias de nuestro área. Para hacer esto, las reglas sobre los estudiantes saliendo del campus durante el día escolar tienen que cambiar. Recomendamos que las maestras de ESOL y español (y posiblemente otros cursos) en cada escuela y los administradores trabajen juntos para formar asociaciones que permiten que los anteriores estudiantes de ESOL vayan a las escuelas primarias para trabajar con los estudiantes menores en ESOL de manera regular como parte del currículo de ambos clases.

Para los estudiantes mayores, el programa les ofrece la oportunidad de reforzar sus propias habilidades académicas y practicar su comunicación bilingüe y habilidades de traducción (que es algo muy vendible). Para los estudiantes menores, el programa les ofrece el apoyo que necesitan para tener la mejor experiencia posible como niño de ESOL por las razones mencionadas arriba.

Este programa puede crecer para incluir las familias, los estudiantes que se han graduado de GHS y otros miembros de la comunidad. Esperamos que las asociaciones que forman sigan año tras año y que los estudiantes que ahora reciben un mentor puedan ser mentores para otros estudiantes en el futuro. Una red de apoyo como esto puede hacer una gran diferencia en las vidas de todos que participan.

[I'm Carrie. I'm 16 and a sophomore. The social problems I see in my community are racism and how people are separated by social class. I don't think that these problems can be changed because no one can completely change how the people think. If he's doing something wrong and I'm doing something right and I come up to him and be like, "you shouldn't do that," he isn't going to listen to me.

I don't think that the people in your neighborhood have anything to do with your thoughts. Because if I'm surrounded by people who didn't graduate, why wouldn't I want to? want to graduate because none of my older siblings finished school. I want to be better than them and show everyone that I'm not like them. You have to try to better yourself, aim for the better life than your parents have.

I learned Spanish from my parents and English at school. My older siblings weren't much help to me. Like my dad always tells my little sister to ask me because I've

been there, and I didn't have no one to ask when I was a kid. Like Dad couldn't help and my older siblings were not graduating and they barely made it out, like sometimes I'd ask my sister-in-law, but really it wasn't much help. But I think it is important that the school help us learn Spanish to, not the basic stuff, but like culture and real language stuff. I feel like we are losing our culture if we don't speak the language. You can't take what they know, what all they know and then...expect them to be successful in school. And involving parents more. It is so true that they want to help but don't think they can. Like the parents at Elmwood, they are there, but maybe they don't feel comfortable. We need to invite them over to sit with us and help the kids with us.

I love helping the kids, especially with their math. I taught this one girl a trick for dividing and she was like, "that's amazing." It made me feel like I had really done something. We can relate to these kids well and communicate completely with their parents because we are just like them. I do think that I have the responsibility to make the world a better place. Next year we could continue if they let us and change the rules!

We wrote this letter to try and persuade them:

Dear teachers and administrators,

We are a group of students at GHS and this semester we participated in a service-learning project about the experiences of students in ESOL. We want to share with you the results of our project and provide a recommendation for the future.

To better understand the situation, we did a survey of teachers of ESOL in PCS and interviews with former students of ESOL. In the survey, we learned that, in the opinion of the teachers, students have to work hard to feel a part of two cultures. Also,

the children are struggle to get a better life. One of the biggest obstacles is that children do not understand the academy and how to navigate it and they get behind on their studies while they are trying to learn English. In the interviews, we learned that the former ESOL students who struggled less with their experiences were those who had older siblings who could help them. It was beneficial to have someone older who speaks English and has experience with the American education system because this person can facilitate communication between home and school, help students with their homework and with their English, and also give advice about being part of two cultures. Students without this support at home have many more difficulties.

Therefore, it is our recommendation that in future it would be good if the former ESOL students at GHS and GMS could work as tutors and mentors for younger students in ESOL at GHS, GMS, and the elementary schools in our area. To do this, the rules on students leaving campus during the school day must change. We recommend that teachers of ESOL and Spanish (and possibly other courses) in each school and administrators work together to form partnerships that allow previous ESOL students go to the other schools to work with younger students in ESOL regularly as part of the curriculum of both classes.

For older students, the program offers them the opportunity to strengthen their own academic skills and practice their bilingual communication and translation skills (which is very marketable). For younger students, the program offers them the support they need to have the best possible experience as a child of ESOL for the reasons mentioned above.

This program can grow to include families, students who have graduated from GHS and other community members. We hope to form partnerships that continue year after year and that students who are now mentees can be mentors to other students in the future. A support network like this can make a big difference in the lives of all involved.]

Raul

I'm Raul. I'm 15 and a sophomore. I don't know Spanish anymore. But I am Mexican. My mom taught me Spanish but I didn't know how to spell or read it. I went to school to learn my English, but learning it was hard. I got mad at that time. It's harder to learn Spanish now. I'm trying tho.

Teachers don't understand us. What are they teaching us? School is like brainwashing kids. They are trapping us. And looking at us like we're criminals. Kids are getting tired of this shit. They get into fights, they drug deal, they cursing at teachers. It might be normal for us to do that. But ya'll citizens looking at us like criminals. Dealin' makes us criminals. But what if we need money? Oh but we're bad people? If you get to know him, you might help him with his struggles.

I'm in the police group. You see a cop hitting people, but he's supposed to protect people. You see people treatin your people bad. That makes you react. Mad or sad. Mad or sad will make you do stuff. Like breaking "there" law. But that's doing what they want cause now they can say that you're a criminal. Now is it our or they're society? So many people getting caught in they're trap. Justicia. Society. It's really hard to bear. Peoples thoughts are the one who controls society. But who controls your thoughts? Government? Music? TV? I can try to control my thoughts. Inner peace. Our group is tellin the story.

We have to tell the stories to change the thoughts. You have to change the thoughts to change the actions.

Summary

Through these narratives, students' individual experiences with critical agency become apparent. In summary, Roberto demonstrated a clear shift from an individualist mindset that prevented him from feeling critically agentic at the beginning of the semester towards a more collectivist perception of social issues and his ability to affect them. Joaquín, on the other hand, maintained his individualist mindset throughout the project—social ills and their solutions were solely rooted in the personal choices of individuals committing “bad” acts—and thus he did not feel like anything he (or anyone else) did could have any effect on the world. Juana's comments indicated that, like Joaquín, she was unsure about whether anyone could really change another person's mind and actions, but that within the context of the project, she did feel collectively critically agentic, if not personally so. Guillermo, Alicia, and Raul, while often operating from similarly individualist mindsets, were able to more critically examine social issues and their solutions from the start. Thus, their senses of agency were more developed and more critical throughout the semester than some of their classmates. The other students' abilities to think about and take actions to change social issues on the personal, interpersonal, and structural levels developed throughout the project. Their shifts may not have been as ontological as Roberto's, but within the context of the project, they did develop senses of critical agency.

In the following two chapters, I return to the data presented in these as I offer my typological analysis and discussion of the notion of critical agency and how the students experienced it. I first explore the “critical” element of the construction—when, to what extent, and why were students able (or not) to think about social issues on the sociopolitical or structural levels? I then break down the notion of “agency” to explore how the students experienced its component parts and when, to what extent, and why was the agency they experienced critical in nature.

CHAPTER VI

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH CRITICAL THINKING

In order for students to experience critical agency, they must first have developed the ability to think critically. The term “critical” is ubiquitous in educational training materials, textbooks, and policy guidelines. It often simply refers to the skills required at the highest levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy and does not imply any kind of theoretical orientation. In contrast to this common usage of “critical” in education, my understanding of the term is framed theoretically by Critical Theory, Critical Race Theory, critical youth studies, and the critical research and pedagogical traditions they inspire. These critical theories have in common an ontological orientation that understands reality to be socially constructed by ideologies that simultaneously work to obscure the very ways that they construct reality. More specifically, critical theories focus on the unequal power dynamics at play in society and the socially constructed assumptions that make those dynamics possible.

Pulling from these critical theoretical traditions, my understanding of “critical” within this project has four core components. Firstly, “critical” implies a critique. In other words, critical teaching, thinking, researching, theorizing, etc. indicates an evaluation, or an attempt to analyze a structure and comment on it. However, unlike the typical skill-focused notion of evaluation, critical theory also posits that true critique involves examining the suppositions that create an evaluation (i.e., constructions of reality,

knowledge, power, etc.) and centers those evaluations on issues of social equity and justice. “Critical” in this sense implies an analysis of social structures and the underlying assumptions and ideologies that create both the social structure in question and the evaluation of it. These social structures could be related to class, race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, citizenship status, age, ability, and so on.

To address this need for evaluation that extends beyond a particular prescribed knowledge set, reflexivity is the second component of “critical.” To be “critical” is to encourage the self-examination of one’s role in social hierarchy throughout the process, be it learning, research, teaching, service or theorizing. Thus, in our context, students studying a particular literary piece, historical event, research report, news article, or video were aware of not only *what* they were learning but *why* they were learning it and how their approach to it and use of it may affect or haven been affected by their place in society. We made an effort to frame the learning in ways that encouraged students to read the word and the world, as Freire (1970) asserts. Third, in addition to reflexivity, “critical” is also concerned with raising questions about the social and cultural milieu that supports, produces, or counters the issue or cause being addressed through the research, teaching, service, learning or theorizing. Thus, during our project, students not only looked within through reflexivity, but looked out and around them, as well, examining the effects of their learning on others and the social structures they were a part of. Fourth, “critical” is transformative. It takes seriously the political focus of the critical theories, the notion of change agent found in the critical research paradigm, and the emancipatory goals of critical pedagogy. Thus, “critical” refers to work in education that actively seeks

to change minds, change conditions, and foster in all stakeholders a sense of long-term democratic responsibility and action.

In this chapter, I examine how students' ability to think critically about the issues they studied and their own experiences developed throughout the semester. I focus on the first three elements of "critical" outlined above. Using their journal entries, our class discussions, their service-learning reflection forms, and our final focus group transcripts as evidence, I analyze how the students identified and framed social issues, the extent to which they could comment on the sociopolitical and structural dynamics working on those issues, the extent to which they were able to think reflexively about the issues, and what factors contributed to each students' critical understanding or lack of it. I address transformation, the fourth element of criticality, in the next chapter in which I analyze the "agency" component of "critical agency."

This chapter is divided into two sections. In the first section, I examine four of our many class activities and interactions. I chose these activities because the questions they asked afforded a clear opportunity for the students to engage in critical analysis and/or reflexivity. They also occurred at different points during the semester, which allowed me to comment on any changes to students' critical thinking over the course of the project. In the second section, I analyze more deeply how and why students experienced and developed (or not) their abilities to think critically throughout the project.

Students' Experiences with Critical Thinking

Public school ordinarily affords students few opportunities to think critically, in the sense described above. Thus, as the students unanimously stated when asked directly

in our final focus group, this project was the first time they were asked to consider on structural and sociopolitical levels *why* certain social realities exist. It was the first time they had been invited by school adults to critique their schooling experience and to think about their own and others' social positioning. Because these were new experiences and new ways of thinking, most students initially struggled with critical thinking, preferring to limit their analysis of social issues to personal and interpersonal causes and effects. They also initially struggled to think reflexively about their own positioning within the sociopolitical systems and structures (e.g. race, class, and ethnicity) we discussed. As such, many students did not exhibit much, if any, criticality at the beginning of the semester. At the midpoint, more were beginning to stretch those critical muscles. At the project's conclusion, more, but not all, of the students were able to engage in a critical analysis of issues and their own work. In each of the following sections, I describe a task that required critical thinking and discuss the extent to which the students demonstrated their criticality through it.

Identifying Social Issues

To begin our work together, after the first few weeks of relationship-building, I asked to students to identify social issues that they felt were problems in their community. Their responses to this question gave me a preliminary baseline regarding the extent of their critical thinking at that moment. We initially brainstormed this question aloud during a class discussion. Using a version of the Five Whys method (Kohfeldt & Langhout, 2012) in which students pose five possible reasons for an identified problem, discuss why those reasons may exist, and then pose additional reasons

for each reason, I attempted to encourage more critical thinking and reflexivity about the issues they identified. The following morning, students wrote a journal entry on the topic. The quotes I include here come from those journal entries.

About half of the students identified personal or interpersonal issues/causes only.

Ana, Jessica, Alicia, and María offer four representative examples of this less-critical problem-posing. Ana called out two problems she saw in her community:

Un problema que veo es que personas no son verdaderas a si mismo...actúan de una manera cuando están junto una persona y luego actúan different cuando no están con esas personas...personas hacen algo para entrar a un grupo o para poder fit in con un grupo de personas [one problem that I see is that people aren't true to themselves...they act one way when they are with one group and later act differently when they aren't with those people...people do something to get into a group or fit in with a group of people.]

In essence, the problems Ana identified were peer pressure and not being true to one's self, both issues situated on the personal/interpersonal level. These issues might have structural or sociopolitical causes, but Ana did not yet connect these problems to broader issues that encourage such behavior, like assimilationist pressures.

Jessica also identified peer pressure as a social problem, along with gossip, which kept her problem-posing on the personal level. She did mention racism, a potentially structural or sociopolitical problem, stating “hay una gente que es racist, la gente no es directa a veces, pero todavia lo piensan...yo misma tengo mis pensamientos racistas pero nadie es perfecto. [there are some people who are racist, people aren't direct about it, but they still think it...I myself have racist thoughts but nobody's perfect].” Her reflection on racism and her own racist thoughts positioned this otherwise higher-order problem

back on the personal level. She accepted racism as inevitable and thus dismissed it as a problem needing work. While she included herself in her problem-posing on racism, the response was not critically reflexive, as she did not examine her own social positioning, towards whom she had these racist thoughts, the relative social power those thoughts carried, and so on, but rather dismissed her racism with “nobody’s perfect.”

Like Jessica, Alicia identified gossip as the main social problem affecting her community. She also pointed out littering as a community issue. María also kept the “community problems” that she identified on a very personal level. She mentioned fights and drug use briefly, framing them as problems of personal choice, not social ills, but she mostly confused social issues with neighborly disputes, stating that the biggest problems in her *barrio* were “los pollos que mi vecino tiene y mi vecino siempre tiene musica prendida. [my neighbor’s chickens and my neighbor’s music that’s always on.]” In doing so, Alicia and María, like Ana and Jessica, did not display a critical understanding of social problems and preferred to keep the discussion of them on a personal level.

Whereas Ana, Jessica, Alicia, and María were only able to identify social problems on very personal levels and framed those problems as issues of personal choice, other students initially posed problems (including racism, classism, and sexism) that were deeply structural and sociopolitical. However, all but one of these students eventually brought these issues back to the personal level by situating the causes and effects of the higher order issues on the personal level only. In the following examples, Juana, Joey, Roberto, and Carrie all identified racism as an issue in their community but situated it

only on the personal level, indicating that they were not yet thinking critically in their problem-posing.

Juana stated that racism was a problem because it created a situation in which “se dividen en grupos y entre esos grupos ay problemas [groups are divided and there are problems between these groups].” However, Juana did not think this problem could be changed because “tendria que cambiar los pensamientos de las personas y todos tenemos pensamientos diferentes [you would have to change the people’s thoughts and everyone has different thoughts].” Thus, Juana boiled racism down to the personal level, framing it as a person’s thoughts to which that person was entitled and which could not be changed.

Like Juana, Joey zeroed in on racism as the biggest social problem affecting him and his community, sharing stories of racial profiling by police in his neighborhood and how he was stereotyped as a pothead by adults at school. Like Juana, he did not think this problem could be changed, stating that “I can’t change the way I look and I can’t change the way people think.” Thus, Joey also reduced racism to “the way people think” which, also like Juana, he did not think was something alterable. Carrie similarly positioned these problems as unchangeable because “no puede cambiar como la gente piensa [I can’t change the way people think].”

By simplifying a higher level issue like racism and framing it as people’s internal thoughts, the students displayed a low level of criticality in their problem-posing. Even though they saw a bigger issue and, especially in Joey’s case, could articulate ways that this structural and sociopolitical problem impacted their daily lived experiences, they

limited their discussion of racism's causes or effects to the personal—the way people think—and also saw it as inevitable and unalterable.

Only one student demonstrated a higher level of criticality in this initial problem-posing. Guillermo also focused on racism and racial profiling, but he consistently discussed the issues on the social as opposed to personal level. After giving a personal example of being targeted for drug searches by the SRO because he is Mexican, he takes the discussion up a level, stating that the justice system and the American public

culpan a los mexicanos por todo, delitos que no hemos cometido...la raza Mexicana es culpada por muchas cosas malas...odia a la cultura Mexicana...sin conocernos, nos juzgan. [blame the Mexicans for everything, crimes we haven't committed...the Mexican race is blamed for so many bad things...you hate the Mexican culture...without knowing us, you judge us.]

Unlike his classmates, Guillermo did not simplify the issue to an individual's unchangeable thoughts. Rather he looked at broader patterns of discrimination, blame, hatred, and misunderstanding that promoted or manifested in the personal experiences he had with law enforcement and school adults.

Based on these initial problem-posing journals, and noting the students' low levels of critical thinking, the teacher and I designed a sequence of investigatory lessons on social issues. Within these lessons, we included news articles, statistical reports, literature, and personal testimonies on the issue under investigation in order to encourage students to understand the personal, interpersonal, and systemic dynamics at play. We modeled reflexivity about our own social positioning relative to the issue and encouraged

students to think about theirs. During each lesson, students wrote journal entries on the topics designed to raise and gauge their levels of critical thinking.

Issues Investigation #1: The School-to-Prison Pipeline

Pulling from the students' concerns about racism and school climate, we introduced the school-to-prison pipeline as our first issue investigation. We used articles, videos, infographics, whole group discussion, and a Webquest in which students investigated organizations around the country who were trying to close the pipeline. During these activities, the students' resistance to looking at issues critically—on their structural or sociopolitical levels—or reflexively became more evident.

At the end of our school-to-prison pipeline study, students were asked to write on the following question: What can be done to close the school-to-prison pipeline? Despite having read and watched texts that approached the issue through a critical lens, many of the students still placed the full blame for the situation on other students, claiming that whatever repercussions befell them were warranted because those students made poor choices. As Juana stated, “the things that can be done [to close the school-to-prison pipeline] is by students doing what they are supposed to be doing.” Similarly, Alicia proposed two solutions for closing the pipeline, both limited to student choice/behavior: “actuar mejor y ser mejor con los maestros [act better and be better with the teachers].” Roberto also wrote “actuar major [act better]” as the only solution for closing the pipeline. Many refused to believe the statistics and evidence presented to them proving the racial bias in the system, exemplified by Nick's assertion that “teachers are not responding to race in doling out punishment. If students of color get punished more

harshly for the same infraction, then it's because they have a track record of being bad. They deserved it." Carrie similarly declared, "This is not the teachers' problem at all [it's the students']."

Others who had personally experienced racial profiling by school adults and community law enforcement, been targeted for searches or detentions, and suffered disproportionately harsh punishments (including suspensions) that negatively impacted their ability to succeed in school were less likely to place the full blame on students, but they still saw the problem as one of personal choice—that of the teacher or administrator. As Joey stressed, "students should follow the rules, but so should the teachers. If the teacher doesn't like the student, they just send them to the office for any little thing. I know because it happens to me all the time." Joey spread the culpability around, but he still failed to recognize how racism and institutional bias factored into the system. Instead, he positioned it as a personality conflict where "the teacher doesn't like the student."

Three students did offer slightly more critical ideas about closing the school-to-prison pipeline. Ana looked past the simple "personal choice" response and posited that the reason suspensions fail to change behavior and result in a spiral into the criminal justice system lay in the fact that suspensions do not address the underlying causes for the student's behavioral transgression. Instead she suggested that adults should "talk to students and about what they did and why and help them find a way out of doing that again. Just sending them out is only helping the teachers. It's the easiest way to deal, but it doesn't solve the real problem." While she did not label what these underlying causes

for students' behavior might be, her response indicated a growing ability to ask *why*. Her response also began to examine the systemic factors at play in school suspension and critique the system as tilted in favor of the adults who were allowed to make the choices easiest for them and then blame the students for the continued failure of the system.

Guillermo's response also demonstrated a higher level of critical engagement because, like Ana, instead of focusing on students' choices as the reason suspension doesn't work, Guillermo looked at the reasons *why* students might continue to make those choices despite suspension—getting behind in/isolation from school and immersion in environments that encourage repeat infractions. Guillermo noted that:

the school system is meant to put education first, but when students are suspended for minor things, they are losing precious instructional time and get behind. Shouldn't they want the students here instead of at home if the goal is education first? Also, for some problems like drugs, home just makes it easier to do that. It's not effective to change the behavior to send them home.

Thus, rather than framing the reason that suspension is an ineffective form of punishment as a matter of students' poor personal choices (as most of his classmates did), Guillermo looked for the root causes and flaws in the system.

Raul also looked for root causes for student behavior and for the way discipline was handled. In our class discussion, he questioned what school was about and who it was really serving and critiqued how he (and some of his classmates) always felt targeted by school adults saying, "They expect us to be bad, so that's what they see." In his journal, Raul continued with this theme stating,

Kids are getting tired of this shit. They get into fights, they drug deal, they're cursing. Maybe it's normal for these kids to do that. But ya'll damn citizens look at them like criminals. If you get to know him, you might help him with his struggles.

His analysis of the problem, though he did not name it explicitly as racist nativism, suggested that the stereotypes teachers and authority figures hold about the Latin@ students lead to discriminatory actions against those students. He called the adults "citizens" which was a term he often used to refer to White or Anglo people, juxtaposing them against the immigrant community (he notably left other people of color out of most of his discussions) viewed by those "citizens" as automatically criminal. Also, like Ana, Raul suggested that relationship-building between adults and youth to help them navigate the challenges that result in behavioral issues may be a way to close the pipeline.

As in the initial problem-posing exercise, many the students demonstrated little critical thought or critical reflexivity during this first issue investigation, though three were beginning to do so. Most remained stuck on the individual level, preferring to frame the issue as a matter of personal choices as opposed to looking at the sociopolitical and systemic causes and effects at play. For our next issue investigation, we incorporated literature and music into the texts that we read, hoping that by including pieces that humanized (even if fictionally) the issue at hand, we might inspire a more empathetic reaction in the students. We wondered if these stories might help the students move away from the detached, "personal choice" framework in which many were currently operating.

Issue Investigation #2: Poverty and Crime

The classroom teacher launched our second issue investigation on the links between crime and poverty by reading and analyzing the short story “Los gallinazos sin plumas” and the song “La historia de Juan” with the students. They then looked at articles connecting poverty rates with crime statistics. Concluding this issue investigation, the students wrote about those connections in a journal entry. Once again, few of the students analyzed the issue with truly critical lenses. Most positioned the crime-poverty connection on an individual level and limited their definition of “crime” to “theft.” They then focused on theft as a possible coping mechanism for surviving poverty. Because they limited what was meant by “crime,” they did not examine the causes and effects of poverty on other types of crime (e.g. violent crime, murder, rape, human trafficking, drug distribution/use), despite having read texts that did so during the investigation. Nor did they conceive of “survival” beyond the acquisition of food and other tangible things needed to live. No one analyzed the connections between poverty, stress, and violence or between poverty and unsafe/unhealthy living conditions. These self-imposed limitations prevented them from examining with more critical nuance the poverty-crime connection.

Joey framed the poverty-crime connection in terms of survival, stating that people living with nothing often must “steal to live,” but he kept his analysis on the personal level, offering no sociopolitical or structural causes for the connection between poverty, hunger, and crime. Additionally, he stated that some people living in poverty turn to crime because they “just see what others have and they want it so they steal it.” This part of his discussion indicated that while Joey did see connections between the social justice

issues of hunger and survival, poverty, and crime, he also partially understood the connection as an issue of jealousy and moral failure. While he was sympathetic to the idea that one may “steal to live,” he was deliberate in pointing out that not all poverty-related theft is about survival.

Roberto’s analysis only focused on the poverty-crime connection as one rooted in jealousy and moral failure—“cuando ellos miran cosas que ellos les gustan pero no pueden afrontar entonces las roban [when they see things they like but can’t afford then they steal them].” Survival was not part of Roberto’s discussion, rather crime (read: theft) was simply a way to get the things one wants without paying for them. Poverty was only the factor that precipitated the lack of funds; it was not integral to Roberto’s analysis. Thus, Roberto’s discussion of the poverty-crime connection was strictly individual and uncritical in that he gave no attention to sociopolitical or structural causes or effects.

Jessica’s framing was similar to Joey’s, stating that “cuando eres pobre a veces tienes que hacer cosas malas para conseguir lo que necesitas [when you’re poor sometimes you have to do bad things to get what you need],” but she did not believe that poverty justified crime in the name of survival, rather that “hay otras cosas para hacer que no sean malas pero lo malo a veces viene mas facil [there are other things you could do that aren’t bad but the bad sometimes come easiest].” In this statement, Jessica indicated that she considers turning to crime to survive poverty as a kind of laziness. Because there are other options for survival (though she does not mention what they are), those who turn to crime do so because it is the “easy” way out of their situation. Thus, while Jessica

saw a link between crime and poverty she did not demonstrate an understanding of that link on a structural or systemic level. Instead, she repositioned the link on the personal level, returning the full blame to the individual who makes “bad choices.”

Ana’s response was very similar to Jessica’s. She initially stated that people living in poverty “tienen que robar algo porque no tienen dinero para comprarlo [have to steal things because they have no money to buy them],” but she quickly shifted away from the steal-to-live narrative into the “lazy poor” narrative, stating that “es más facil robar [it’s easier to steal]” and “más pobres comitan crimenes porque es más facil para los pobres comitan un crimen que otras personas [more poor people commit crimes because it’s easier for poor people to commit crimes than for other people].” Not only did she, like Jessica, frame crime among the poor as the “easy” way out, she may also have made a moral judgement against “poor people’s” character by indicating that committing crime is “easier” for them than for others. Her analysis was firmly positioned on the individual level, and thus, did not represent a critical understanding of the issue.

Carrie’s response also positioned the poverty-crime connection on the individual level and followed the “lazy poor” narrative. She stated “los pobres quieren dinero rápido, entonces hacen cosas malas como vender drogas y robar a gente [the poor want fast money, so they do bad things like sell drugs and rob people].” Her response indicated, like Jessica’s and Ana’s, that poverty did not promote crime by limiting other options but rather that crime was a personal choice of those who wanted “easy” or “fast” money (the implication being that they did not want to “work” for it). She was also the only student to mention drugs as part of crime, but her reference still focused on drugs as

a means for acquiring “fast money.” She did not analyze the connections between drug use and poverty.

Like Joey, Jessica, and Ana, María understood crime to be a coping mechanism for surviving poverty, but she discussed it more sympathetically, describing parents who “van a hacer todo lo que pueden [are going to do everything they can]” for their children’s sake, even if that means crime. While her answer was no more critical than Joey, Ana, or Jessica’s in that it stopped short of examining the sociopolitical or structural issues at play, it did represent a shift away from the victim-blaming, “lazy poor” narrative.

Alicia’s analysis followed the crime-for-survival trend and also avoided the “lazy poor” narrative—“no tienen dinero, comida, o hasta casa por eso no les queda de otra que robar, matar, etc. [not having money, food, or even a home, for these reasons, they have no other options but to rob or kill, etc.]” While equally uncritical in that it did not examine *why* these barriers exist, Alicia did not frame crime as strictly a personal choice problem, but one that results directly from the desperate lack of options facing those living in poverty. She was also the only student who extended the definition of “crime” past “theft,” although the crux of her discussion still centered on crime as a means of survival in the sense of acquiring the things needed to live.

The teacher and I hypothesized that, despite having read articles and looked at graphics that discussed crime beyond theft and its links to poverty, it appeared that the students were more heavily influenced (in their definition of “crime”) by the literature in which the characters are stealing in order to eat and survive. However, despite having had

deeply sympathetic reactions to both the short story and song (as reported to me by the teacher; this discussion occurred on a day when I was not there collecting data), they did not convert that sympathy to empathy in their analysis of the issue under investigation. In other words, while they felt badly for people living in poverty, they did not translate that feeling into perspective-taking (Davis, Luce, & Kraus, 1994) which might have facilitated a more critical examination of poverty and crime by mitigating their tendency to victim-blame. Because they did not examine the social forces at play, the students continued to frame social issues as problems of personal choice or moral failure. Wondering if a more obviously personal topic might help students empathize with those affected by the issue which might encourage them examine its social milieu, we chose disproportionate rates of poverty among people of color in the U.S. for our next investigation.

Issue Investigation #3: U.S. Poverty Rates in Populations of Color

Knowing that about half the class qualified for free and reduced lunch (the typical marker of “low socioeconomic status” in the school system) and that all but two were either first generation Mexican-Americans or immigrants themselves, the teacher and I expected that the students would be able to personally identify more closely with the this third issue: the discrepancy between the rates of poverty for Blacks, Whites, and Latin@s versus their percentages of the total U.S. population. For this investigation, students began by writing a journal entry accounting for the poverty-by-race statistics presented in an infographic. Afterwards, they examined additional infographics and statistics and read articles that offered a critical analysis of the reasons for the disproportionate rates of

poverty among races in the U.S. The following examples are pulled from the initial journal entry and ensuing class discussion in which the students were asked to account for the statistics prior to having studied any articles about them. Thus, the thoughts they expressed here primarily arose from their lived experiences, not from scholarly study of the problem. As we expected, the deeper personal connection seemed to facilitate their critical thinking about this topic.

Juana's response connected several layers of cause and effect with regards to disproportionate poverty among Latin@s, indicating a higher level of criticality. She determined that "la pobreza para los hispanos tiene que ver mucho sobre ser legal o no...eso deja muchos sin trabajo o con trabajo que no pague un precio justo [poverty among Hispanics has a lot to do with being legal or not...this leaves many without work or with work that doesn't pay fairly]" Thus, she identified limited work opportunities as one cause of poverty and extended her analysis to the cause of those limit opportunities—legal status. Tracing the causes to this sociopolitical level made her analysis more critical, if narrow in scope.

Jessica's response also demonstrated an increased level of criticality over her other work as she was able to identify sociopolitical and structural causes and effects for the discrepancy stating, "los hispanos no pueden conseguir trabajo tan facil que los Blancos y los asiaticos...porque aunque vienen a los EE.UU. para trabajar...no ocupan a la gente si no es ciudadano [Hispanics can't get jobs as easily as Whites and Asians...because although they come to the U.S. to work...they won't hire people who aren't citizens]." Her statement, like Juana's, recognizes that there are higher order

barriers to gainful employment for Latin@s in the U.S., and that these barriers contribute to the disproportionate rate of poverty among that ethnic/racial group. She also countered the “lazy Mexican” stereotype by reiterating that immigrants come here to work. Her critical lens, however, only extended to Latin@s. With regards to Black Americans, Jessica was stumped as to their disproportionate poverty—“no se la razon por los negros [I don’t know the reason for Blacks].” This confusion indicated that while Jessica may have seen a structural cause for Latin@ poverty rates, she did not see the role that race played in that structure. Because she only saw it as an issue of citizenship status, not racism or nativism, she could not extend her critique to Black Americans’ situation.

Carrie’s analysis also focused on a lack of papers and citizenship status as structural barriers to economic opportunity for Latin@s. She also mentioned that many immigrant Latin@s have not had access to education, which limits their job chances. But like Jessica, she could not extend her critical analysis to Black Americans’ disproportionate rates of poverty stating, “no se porque los negros estan pobres porque ellos tienen la oportunidad de tener una educación [I don’t know why Black people are poor because they have the opportunity to have an education].” This confusion indicated that Carrie also failed to see structural barriers beyond citizenship status (and its impact on educational opportunity) to economic success. Because her analysis focused on legal and practical issues specific to Latin@ immigrants (e.g. no papers, lack of education in home country) and not racism or nativism, she could not extend that analysis to examine unequal access to quality public education and higher education, workplace discrimination, generational poverty, and other systemic barriers facing all people of

color—all of which would be discussed in the readings the students ultimately did during the issue investigation. Thus, while her analysis was *more* critical, she stopped short of fully critically examining the issue.

Roberto did not link the diminished job prospects of Latin@ and Black Americans to citizenship status but rather to the stereotypes society holds about those individuals—“los estereotipos que la gente tiene afectan quien puede tener trabajo o no [the stereotypes the people have affects who can have jobs or not].” While he did not specifically call out racism or nativism in his discussion, he did indicate that these stereotypes result in discriminatory hiring practices. Thus, Roberto identified a structural cause for the limited job opportunities facing people of color. Moreover, unlike in other entries where he positioned racism as a personal choice as opposed to a system of oppression, in this entry Roberto avoided such individualization of the problem, which kept his focus more critical.

Unlike Jessica, Carrie, Juana, and Roberto, whose work did represent more critical thinking, Joaquín only saw personal reasons for the discrepancies in poverty rates among races—“school and jobs people have, how much they get paid. That’s just how it is.” He did not elaborate on why certain races may be disproportionately represented in certain jobs or pay scales or the causes and effects of disparate educational opportunities. He focused only on the individual and their personal choices. His last statement—“That’s just how it is”—further implied that he saw these racial disparities as inevitable or natural as opposed to indicative of active, broader systems of oppression. Joey’s answer was similarly individual—“They’re poor because of their jobs.” Like Joaquín, he did not

elaborate on the reasons why they may hold lower paying jobs, indicating that, while he did provide a “cause” (jobs) for the “effect” (poverty), it did not take into account the sociopolitical and structural levels of the issue.

Ana gave three reasons for the discrepancy between poverty levels and percentage of the general population: “de donde esas personas vienen, los trabajos que tienen, y la educación [where these people come from, what jobs they have, and their education].” Thus, like her classmates, she offered causes for the effect, but because she did not elaborate on why or how these factors contribute to the issue, her analysis stayed on an individual, less-critical level, though she was beginning to think more deeply about *why* certain social realities exist.

The teacher and I were encouraged that some of the students had begun to demonstrate more critical thinking on this third issue. The personal connection seemed to make a difference for some of the students, though they only seemed to be able to make those critical connections with regards to their own race. Noting the impact that personally identifying with the issue had on many of the students’ ability to think critically about it, we hoped that their YPAR projects, all of which had deeply personal connections to the students’ lives, would continue to encourage more critical thinking.

Students’ YPAR Work

In their on-going reflections on their YPAR and service-learning work (which I gathered using reflection forms, in-class conversations, and focus groups), most of the students were able to connect their projects to sociopolitical or structural issues, indicating that by the end of the semester, they were thinking more critically about the

social issues affecting them. Two reflection activities offered representative examples of the students' levels of critical thinking about their topics and their goals. The first activity occurred at the beginning of phase four, after their research was complete as they began to take actions based on that research. It offered evidence of how the students' critical thinking about their projects' goals and impacts grew more critical over time. The second activity occurred in our last working session and served as each group's final reflection. I conducted each group's conversation as a semi-structured focus group. Their exchanges indicated that their overall understanding of their issue's causes and effects also grew considerably more critical over the course of the project.

Critical thinking about their YPAR goals. By the time the students reached phase four, their thinking about their YPAR project goals was more critical. On the reflection form, which each group of students completed together, they discussed the personal-, interpersonal-, and social-level goals and impacts of their work. We had already defined these categories during our problem-posing phase, and the groups' responses demonstrated that at this point in the project, unlike during the problem-posing phase, they were all able to consider their YPAR goals on multiple planes.

During the problem-posing phase, the ESOL group struggled to see their work as anything other than interpersonal. As Carrie had said, "We are just wanting to help kids, like one-on-one." But after researching their topic, the group expanded their goals, stating that their work had implications on all three levels:

We are personally helping ourselves because we are practicing our skills as we tutor. It also helps each kid personally feel inside themselves like they are more successful and like they can learn in school, which might be personal or

interpersonal, we don't know. We are helping interpersonally because we are helping teachers and kids and parents communicate. And we are trying to make the experience better for all kids in this situation, like give the schools advice on how to improve the programs which could mean better outcomes in school, so that is social.

Even though they were not always sure how to break their impacts cleanly into the three categories, the group's response did demonstrate that they understood their work to have overlapping effects on multiple levels. Their response also represented critical thinking because it broadened their scope beyond the interpersonal amelioration of conditions (tutoring to help one struggling kid) to trying to affect systemic change (petitioning the schools to make certain program changes that they identified through their research as having the potential to improve ESOL student outcomes).

Unlike the ESOL group, the group investigating police brutality and racial profiling had always brought more criticality to their analysis. In this activity, they continued to demonstrate a critical analysis of their project's focus, even if they did not feel like the structural impact they hoped to make was possible, as I will discuss in the next chapter. They described their project as operating on all three levels:

We are personally helped by this work. We are learning about current events and figuring out why this stuff happens. We are interpersonally helping because we are trying to make things better for our friends and family who are affected by this stuff by sharing the information with them. Mostly we are hoping to change the system, but we don't know if that's possible. We are trying to offer the system ways to improve, like body cameras and meetings and accountability measures. Change the system, it helps everyone. No justice, no peace! End police brutality!

Their response, like the ESOL group's, demonstrated a critical analysis of their project goals because it approached the issue on all levels. They also continued to connect their

topic to the notion of social justice; in other words, justice in terms of equality of opportunity and human rights as opposed to an interpersonal notion of fairness, which indicated that their focus was more critical.

The group working with the Health Project on HIV also articulated their project goals on all levels. Because of the shuffle that occurred mid-semester (when Nick and another student left the study, dissolving their group), this group was late to form and thus, this activity was the first reflection in which they specifically addressed how their YPAR goals fit within a personal, interpersonal, and social framework. As such, I cannot comment on whether their response here represented a continuation of or a shift towards criticality, but it did indicate that at this point in the semester they too could critically analyze their work's potential impact:

Nuestro trabajo nos ayuda porque hemos aprendido mucho sobre la prevención de HIV. Pues, es personal. También, creemos que ayudamos interpersonalmente a la gente con que hablamos que ahora sabe más sobre HIV y pueden hablar con sus niños. Y vamos a ayudar al Health Project con el dinero. En el nivel social, si nuestro trabajo parara el HIV en la comunidad, sería un efecto social [Our work helps us because we have learned a lot about preventing HIV. So it is personal. Also, we think that we help interpersonally the people we talk to because now they'll know more about HIV and can talk to their kids. And we will help the Health Project with money and with information on how to talk to Hispanics about HIV and get them help. On the social level, if our work helps stop HIV in the community that would be a social effect].

Their response did not clearly demonstrate that they understood their work in terms of combatting sociopolitical or structural inequities or power dynamics, though it implied that there was currently a problem with effective HIV outreach in the Latin@ community and that they were trying to address it. However, it clearly did indicate that they saw a

potential social, not just personal or interpersonal, impact of their work. As such, it represented a burgeoning critical understanding of their project.

While this reflection activity focused on the students' critical thinking regarding their project goals, their responses during our final focus group provided evidence of how the students' understanding of the core issues their projects addressed had also grown more critical throughout the YPAR process.

Critical thinking about social issues through their YPAR project. In the beginning of the semester, as I previously described, the students were quick to reduce social issues to personal defects. They often fell into victim-blaming and rugged individualism narratives, positioning systemic problems like racism, nativism, and poverty as simple issues of personal choice. However, after conducting their research projects and taking their change-seeking actions in the community, most of the students were able to critically talk about the social issue they studied.

Some of the students in the group studying police brutality and racial profiling, for example, had previously talked about the issue solely as a matter of poor choices on the part of the cops. They blamed the individual and struggled with the notion that there might be something going on structurally or socio-politically that influenced the police officers' decision-making and action-taking (notably, Guillermo was an exception to this generalization, having always looked more critically at the causes and effects of police-community interactions). However, by the final focus group, every student in the group could critically analyze the problem and offer structural solutions to it, though Joaquín continued to resist the idea that change was really possible.

Beginning our conversation about why police brutality occurred and how we could stop it, Guillermo stated that part of the problem stemmed from a flaw in the system: “One thing is they get away with it and they know they will because it is too hard to make complaints. They need to have like a central way to make complaints and it needs to not be through the cops. And body cameras.” His observation indicated that he was able to critique a certain concrete problem (cops control the complaint system and it is confusing and unsafe for citizens to use) as contributing to one reason (lack of accountability) for the social issue under investigation (police brutality and racial profiling) and offer a solution to that problem (citizen-run centralized complaint system and body cameras). He dug into the *why* of a social issue and commented on its sociopolitical/structural and practical causes and solutions, demonstrating deep critical thinking.

Another exchange between the group members also evidenced their advancing critical thinking about their topic:

Jason: Also I think the cops feel threatened by Black and Latino people. They think people of color are going to go against them, and they take actions first.

Guillermo: But sometimes, like Hispanic cops stop a Mexican and they are harder on them. And the Baltimore cops that were indicted, they were Black. Like they think they have to try and impress them or something.

Me: So what else do you think is going on here beyond race?

Guillermo and Roberto: Power. [others nod or grunt affirmatively]

Guillermo: The way I see it, the cops see themselves above civilians. Like they think they are better and on a different playing field. Like when a cop gets shot, the person shooting is going to jail, the story don't matter. They are a criminal.

But a cop shoots someone else, he's a hero automatically. The rest don't matter. Different starting assumptions. And that lets cops get away with abuses of power.

In this exchange, the students evidenced that they were able to consider multiple root causes of the issue and the way that the causes interacted. They called out racism, but quickly complicated racism with power, describing the way that an unequal power dynamic (cop vs. civilian), possibly coupled with racism and supported by society, could create a situation of diminished accountability in which a cop could safely abuse his power. Guillermo's assertion that in police-civilian encounters "the story don't matter" because there are "different starting assumptions" indicated that he held society at large also responsible for propping up the power dynamics that contribute to police brutality. Because society bought into that narrative, accountability diminished, contributing to the larger issue.

In a later exchange, the group added another dimension to their analysis, drawing a comparison between policing in Canada and the U.S., which they had read about during their review of literature:

Guillermo: Their first priority right now is making an arrest. And that might not be the right thing, like how can you know what the real situation is all the time right when you roll up? Like the kid in Cleveland, I think, with the airsoft gun. They should go up and ask more questions.

Roberto: Do an interview.

Guillermo: Have a conversation instead of resorting to violence. And even when shooting is "justified," was that really the only way?

Roberto: 'Cause Canada, they hardly have any cops killing people. It's super different there. But they can be that way, more peaceful. Their culture, they take in ideas, open to listening. Here we don't take in ideas.

The students' assertion that cops should ask more questions and try to find peaceful solutions before resorting to violence represented another structural solution to the issue, but this exchange also included two additional sociopolitical critiques—that our society privileges violence/confrontational action over peaceful engagement and that we are not as open to ideas or to listening as societies with other systems of policing.

These two exchanges demonstrated that the students had moved well beyond blaming individual cops for brutality and racial profiling and instead were able to describe overlapping social and structural factors that contribute to the problem. Moreover, while their solutions were often concrete (e.g. body cameras, empathetic policing tactics, and non-police-run oversight committees), they were aimed at changing the culture that produces police abuse of power as opposed to simply weeding out “bad” cops. Their thinking about the issue and how to solve it was thus deeply critical.

The HIV group also demonstrated a much more critical understanding of their issue during the final reflection focus group. Operating from the premise presented to them by the Heath Project that HIV outreach in the Latin@ community was challenging, they used their investigation to determine why that might be and what they could do about it. Initially, they focused on the language barrier and personal discomfort with the topic as the main reasons outreach was difficult—real factors that needed to be addressed—but after conducting their surveys and holding their donation/information booths, the group began to think more critically about the causes of their issue and moved beyond the personal or interpersonal reasons initially identified.

Jessica noted several factors that she and her group mate identified as “cultural” contributed to the difficulty in conducting HIV outreach in their Spanish-speaking (mostly Mexican) community:

The hardest part is getting the community’s attention. Like they don’t think about protection like that, like they don’t talk about HIV at all. It’s more about pregnancy. Prevent pregnancy. Period. They don’t inform their kids. They don’t go deeper than that if they go at all. The parents say the kids are too young to talk about safe sex or that it isn’t appropriate or against their religion. But maybe that’s all parents, not just Hispanics. And the teens, the way their head works, think about pregnancy first, they don’t think HIV will happen to them. No one they know is HIV positive, probably one is, but no one talks about it, so they think no one is. But they know people get pregnant. Part of that is also machismo. They think, Mexican men think, HIV won’t happen because only gay people get infected and they don’t go around people like that. Also girls, they can’t ask a guy because boys are strong or whatever, so the conversation about HIV never comes up. Because the conversation before sex, if the girl does say something, it’s just ‘You got a wrap? I don’t want to get pregnant.’ They don’t mention HIV.

In her discussion, Jessica demonstrated a more critical understanding of why the challenges of HIV outreach in the Spanish-speaking community exist. Beyond the interpersonal language barrier and the personal “discomfort” she had previously posited, her final reflection showed that she could call out higher order factors—religion, child-parent boundaries, the invisibility of HIV in their community, machismo, expected gender roles during sexual encounters—that compose the more serious, sociocultural barriers to HIV outreach (not all of which were unique to the Spanish-speaking community, as she acknowledged).

The ESOL group also moved beyond the personal and interpersonal factors they initially proposed as the causes for the different levels of success among ESOL students. While those personal and interpersonal causes, like the ones laid out by the HIV group,

were real and needed to be addressed, the sociocultural and systemic issues they uncovered during their project afforded them a more critical understanding of the problem as a whole.

In their conversation about what factors affected an ESOL student's success, Carrie proposed that while there were personal elements to consider, "like how quickly a kid gets frustrated and gives up on work" there were "bigger things" that affected their success. In the following exchange, the group demonstrated that they had begun to think beyond the personal (an individual ESOL student's fortitude or intelligence) and interpersonal (getting/giving academic help) and consider systemic or sociocultural reasons that some ESOL students struggle more than others.

Carrie: They need to learn English and the school does a pretty good job with that. But the school needs to also help them learn Spanish.

María: The classes they have are like the basics if they have it at all.

Joey: They need it to communicate. Parents get mad if you can't communicate.

Carrie: I feel like you're losing your culture if you don't speak the language.

Ana: We need English to socially advance.

Joey: But you gotta keep a balance.

Carrie: You can't take what they know, what all they know and then...

María: You can't force them to be something they aren't to be successful, like that's kind of racist.

At this point in their conversation, the students hit on the importance of respecting home languages and cultures throughout the ESOL process (and beyond), emphasizing that

there needs to be a balance between learning English and adapting to “American” ways and preserving contact with their heritage. What they implied here, and in other journal entries—that when the school values and respects home languages and cultures, those students are more likely to succeed—demonstrated their growing ability to look at systemic factors related to student success, which they were able to translate into concrete recommendations for the school system.

At another point in the conversation, Joey reiterated his earlier assertion that the school system needs to more actively support ESOL *families* and not just the students:

Joey: To help more we need to involve the families more. Like really reach out. Make them feel welcome. Invite them.

María: Yeah, like offer, ESL for parents so that they...

Joey: They really want to help...my mom doesn't try to communicate with teachers because she wants to learn English but can't find a way to...

Carrie: That's so true...

María: But they feel their kids struggle and they can't do anything to help. Like my dad, he would see me struggle and say 'I want to help you but I can't,' and it was like simple work and he couldn't help. And he could never go to PTA or anything like that.

Joey: It's like that for every Hispanic family, they want you to work really hard but they can't help. Some had no school and school is so different in Mexico. The poor don't go.

Carrie: Like my dad always tells my little sister to ask me because I've been there, but I didn't have no one to ask when I was a kid.

Joey and María: Me neither.

In this exchange, the students identified another systemic problem affecting ESOL student outcomes—the challenges to involvement facing non-English-speaking parents. But they did not frame it as a cultural or personal deficit, like some of the literature they had read did. One PCS report implied that the families were not involved because they did not value education or were not interested in their children's schooling. Instead, the students pointed to the parent's lack of resources needed to learn English and their inexperience with education systems as a whole as the bigger barriers to effective parent involvement in their children's schooling. In doing so, they took the deficit-oriented finding presented in the PCS document, offered a critical examination of its root causes, and presented a systemic solution—actively and directly involve the parents more and perhaps offer ESL classes. Moreover, in this conversation they began to rehash why they settled on the action they took—they wanted to fill a gap that they had experienced—to be mentors for current ESOL kids, someone who had “been there and done that” to help them and their parents navigate U.S. schooling.

Through their YPAR projects, each group of students reached a level of critical engagement with their topic, as evidenced both by the goals they set and the nuanced way they were able to talk about the issue as a whole. The investigations and actions helped some students reinforce already critical understandings of social problems and others to move beyond the hyper-focus on personal choice evident in their early work. In the following section, I discuss two factors that affected the students' experiences with critical thinking during our project.

Factors Affecting How Students Experienced Critical Thinking

Throughout the semester, some students demonstrated higher levels of criticality in their work than others. Looking across cases, two main factors emerged that help explain the variety in students' experiences. The dominant factor, which emerged during my earliest stages of typological analysis and also deeply impacted how students experienced agency, was the students' ontological orientation towards individualism. This tendency to position social problems and their causes and solutions entirely on the personal level initially impeded students' willingness to engage in critical analysis. Additionally, each student's social positioning and the extent to which they had personally been affected by the problems they were analyzing also impacted their ability to think critically about the issues. Generally, the deeper the personal connection to the topic at hand, the higher the level of critical thought the student displayed.

Individualism's Impact on Critical Thinking

Greene (2008), in his article on ideologies of individualism, offers a general definition of the orientation as the "sociocultural beliefs and practices that encourage and legitimate the autonomy, equality, and dignity of the individuals" (p. 117). He adds that "individualism may imply the protection of individual rights, individual wealth, personal growth, nonconformity, self-fulfillment, outdoor adventure, individual achievement, 'rugged individualism,' and/or the 'American spirit'" (p. 118). For these students, individualism often manifested in the idea of "personal choice," which encompassed the notions of "individual rights," "individual achievement," and "rugged individualism" mentioned in Greene's definition.

Throughout their problem-posing and issues investigation, the students consistently reduced sociopolitical and structural ills like racism and nativism to personal choices. In our second problem-posing session, Roberto's statement summarized the class's frustration with my push-back against the personal choice narrative:

In the end, it comes to personal choice. No matter what we talk about it is personal choice, racism—personal choice, dropping out—personal choice, getting a job—personal choice, or even being a good role model—personal choice. We're talking about a human being—it's a personal choice. That's what pops to your mind. Human is personal choice.

Roberto's statement, which received a chorus of "Yes!" from his classmates, exemplified the students' deep-seated individualist ideology. In their framework, to be human was to make choices. And those choices were one's own, they could not be influenced by or blamed on others or on systems of oppression. As Jessica added, "They are going to give you life lessons and you are going to take it or not. It's all up to you." Thus, not only was one's ultimate choice solely their own, but so could an individual decide whether or not to be affected by external forces acting on them during the choice-making process. Their ideology placed a tremendous importance on autonomy and self-determination, which can be key to empowerment and a sense of critical agency, as I discuss in the following chapter. However, when not coupled with social consciousness and critical thinking, this emphasis on the isolated Self making personal choices led to relativism (which justified oppression) and victim-blaming, both of which diminished their senses of critical agency.

Exemplifying relativism, in our class discussion on race within the context of the school-to-prison pipeline, Jessica, María, Nick, Carrie, Joey, and Juana all framed racism

as “people’s thoughts.” In doing so, they ignored the ways that racism was institutionalized—the systemic biases that negatively impact people of color—and instead viewed it as something that only came into play during specific person-to-person interactions (thus, limiting its potential impact). Nick specifically rejected the notion of structural racism, stating that “You’re trying to blame this on some kind of system. No, it’s all about personal choice.” Moreover, while none of them thought that people acting in racist ways was fair, as evidenced by their universal outrage over the José/Joe BuzzFeed video in which a man applying for jobs only received callbacks after Anglicizing his name, they defended an individual’s right to be racist. As Juana stated with a shrug, “todos tenemos pensamientos diferentes [we all have different thoughts].” Thus, in the spirit of respect for individual opinion, people were entitled to have these racist thoughts and it was not their place to try to change them. This slip into relativism, propped up by their ideology of individualism, deeply affected their willingness to look at issues on sociopolitical levels.

Their individualist ideology also facilitated a victim-blaming mentality that similarly manifested as “personal choice,” even when discussing issues that personally affected them, their families, and their neighbors. Carrie exemplified this victim-blaming stating, “I mean with getting a job, like it’s your choice to not do work...I mean there is factors that affect it...but it’s still your choice. You can’t just say there’s ‘racism’ because each individual makes their own choice.” Her assertion implied that regardless of any obstacles in one’s path, their outcomes are above all a product of their own will and determination. Nick’s opinion was similar: “Everything that anyone does, things

influence you and everything is connected, but at the end of the day you choose what you do with those interactions, if you choose to take it, to ignore it, to argue it, it's all on you...no one does it for you." Thus, because they viewed all things in terms of personal choice, many of them rejected the idea that racism, nativism, or classism could limit one's opportunities, framing the real problem as simply poor individual decision-making. Because of this "bootstrap mentality," the students were consistently quick to blame the person affected by racism, classism, nativism, poverty, etc. for their own condition, as we saw in all three issue investigations previously described. Because they understood another individual's plight as his or her own responsibility (and thus not something that they, the student, could or should try to change), this victim-blaming diminished both their willingness to critically examine issues and their senses of critical agency in resolving those issues, as I discuss in the next chapter.

The Impact of Students' Social Positioning on Their Critical Thinking

While nearly all students evidenced an individualist ideology, each students' positionality also impacted the way in which individualism influenced their experience with critical thinking and agency. Students' citizenship status and that of their families, their phenotypes, their English language skills/accents, their families' educational experiences, and their socioeconomic statuses all contributed to the extent to which they immediately identified (or not) with certain social issues and the level of critical reflexivity they engaged in (or not) surrounding those issues. Before discussing how their social positioning affected their critical engagement, in the following paragraphs I offer a general overview of that social positioning.

Based on free and reduced lunch statistics for the class, about half of the students were of low SES, living in varying degrees of poverty. The teacher regularly fed several of the students breakfast, knowing the food insecurities they faced at home, and both Guillermo and Raul talked about hustling to get money to buy food. Carrie, María, Nick, and Ana, on the other hand, openly discussed their families' relative wealth, describing the financial details of their quinceañeras and vacations.

Nick and Ana were the only students whose families had immigrated to the U.S. through legal channels. Nick's family, having first migrated from Cuba to Puerto Rico several generations back and then, in his parent's generation, from Puerto Rico to the U.S. mainland, already had full U.S. citizenship upon arrival. Ana's family was sponsored by her father's company in their move from Colombia to North Carolina. The other students either had undocumented parents and/or siblings or were undocumented themselves. Those who were U.S. citizens were citizens by birth. None were naturalized citizens.

All of the students spoke Spanish and English, with varying degrees of fluency and accent. Most spoke with close to a "typical" American accent, though Carrie, Juana, Roberto, and Jason all stated that people tell them they "sound Mexican." All but Nick had received at least some ESOL services when they entered the public school system. Nick and Ana were the only students who knew no one who had dropped out of school and the only ones who knew "many people" and family members who had graduated college. All the other students reported having friends or immediate family members who had dropped out or who had not had access to high school or higher education in Mexico.

Carrie, Roberto, Joey, and Jason stated that they aimed to be the first in their families to graduate high school.

All students self-identified as either Hispanic or Latin@, but many were confused as to whether that term referred to their race or their ethnicity. In our initial discussions of identity, they framed race as a matter of Black or White and positioned themselves as something in between. Guillermo noted, “We don’t really have a race, just an ethnicity.” Phenotypically, none of the students would be considered “Black.” In our early discussions on identity, Alex, Jessica, Ana, and Joaquín made references to their White passing privilege, discussing how they were sometimes told they weren’t really Hispanic because they had light skin but dark hair. In our discussion of the José/Joe video, Guillermo identified their names as another marker of race beyond their phenotypes. He noted that the more Hispanic-sounding their names, the more likely that they would be stereotyped or racially profiled. In choosing their pseudonyms, the students and I tried to reflect the level of “Latino-ness” evident in their real names.

As expected, the students with the most social privilege tended to be the most resistant to critically analyzing issues, often because they were blind to the existence of the issue under investigation. As McIntosh (1989) and Johnson (2006) have asserted, social privilege often renders oppression invisible because it buffers the privileged from the lived experiences of that oppression. Thus, the socially privileged person may deny that oppressive social structures exist, that inequitable lived experiences are the result of oppressive social structures, or even that the lived experiences themselves are real (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

This social privilege-induced blindness affected the extent to which certain students were willing to engage critically, particularly in the first half of the semester. Nick, socially privileged in terms of phenotype, citizenship status, SES, family educational background, and language, was never willing to acknowledge racial bias in the school-to-prison pipeline and poverty statistics, denied that the José/Joe video could be real, and blamed undocumented people for their own plight in not finding gainful, safe employment stating, “if you come illegally, you don’t have the papers, you don’t get the job. That’s your fault.” When the teacher and I encouraged him to think more critically about his own social positioning and to see if he could consider the viewpoints of others, he resisted, stating that “there is nothing to think about. I am who I am and my family is who they are because we work hard and don’t make excuses.”

Carrie and Roberto, both socially privileged in terms of SES, similarly had difficulty in the beginning reflexively examining their social positioning relative to the issues under investigation. They resisted the notions that language, educational background, and citizenship status could be barriers to economic success based on the success stories of some of their family members. In an early class discussion about social issues, Roberto asserted “I don’t believe the numbers, I mean I have family who didn’t graduate and they are doing great things with their lives. My primo really, he didn’t graduate, but he’s a leader in his company.” Carrie agreed, calling out “and my Dad!” While they knew many more people who had not overcome those barriers, the existence of an exception to that rule (whose success also afforded them a level of privilege), was enough to induce a privilege-related blindness towards those systems of oppression.

Other students, like Joey, Joaquín, Jason, and Juana, also initially and repeatedly emphasized personal choice as the only cause and effect for any problem and ignored or denied sociopolitical factors. But their initial resistance to critically examining oppressive social systems was not due to privilege-induced blindness, but rather a reflection of their individualist ideology. As Greene (2008) noted, “individualistic beliefs may foster a sense or illusion of empowerment among the otherwise disempowered. Among lower-class Americans, for example, 69 percent believe that they have a great deal of free choice and control over the outcomes of their lives,” unlike the lower-class in other countries who recognize their disempowerment (p. 118). Related to the American notion of rugged individualism, or a “bootstrap mentality,” in which each person is believed to have equal opportunities for success, to be fully responsible for their own life choices, and thus to be deserving of their success or failure, the students’ tendency to centralize the individual as the nexus of social ills prevented them from looking at systems and structures at play even when they personally were being negatively affected by those systems and structures. Thus, for these students, their individualist ideology inhibited their ability to critically see and examine issues in much the same way that social privilege blinded others.

However, as the semester progressed, most of these students (except for Nick who exited the study—partially because the principal required his group to change topics and also, I think, to escape the challenges to his ideology that our work presented), began to either use their social positioning as a starting point for critically examining an issue or began to be more critically reflexive about their social privilege. By mid-semester, during

the issue investigation on disproportionate poverty rates for people of color, both Roberto and Carrie had moved beyond their initial denial and discussed racial stereotypes and legal status/educational opportunity, respectively, as structural barriers to economic success for Latin@s. They were both able to draw on the lived experiences of others they knew and the facts they had read to name some of the sociopolitical causes for the effect under study, overcoming their initial tendency to reject stories that weren't part of their personal lived experience. Notably, Carrie did not extend her analysis beyond Latin@s to other communities of color, indicating that her social positioning as Latina may have facilitated her critical analysis of issues specific to that population, but not in a way that was transferable to other groups with whom she had less social positioning in common. In the same activity, Juana and Jason also recognized the sociopolitical factors at play, discussing the impact of legal status, language, and educational opportunity on job prospects and thus poverty rates. In his YPAR work, Jason was also extremely vocal about the impact of race on policing in the community and student management within the school. His personal experience with being racially targeted for a drug search by the SRO midway through the semester galvanized his newly critical understanding of systemic racism. As he stated,

Before that I didn't really believe the kids were being targeted for race 'cause some of them really do drugs and I thought they were just complaining. I thought 'I don't do that, so I'm good' and then this happens and now I see there is a bias or profiling at least. It made [what we talk about in class] real.

For other students, their social positioning afforded them a lens through which they were able to critically critique the dynamics they felt at play in their own lives from

the beginning of the semester. Guillermo and Raul, for example, immediately recognized sociopolitical and structural forces at work in the issues that we studied. They shared personal stories about how nativism, racism, and poverty impacted their decision-making and limited their life chances. They still held an individualist mentality, which gave them a sense of autonomy, and they felt a responsibility for their choices, but they understood that structural factors influenced and restricted those choices. As Guillermo stated,

There's racism in the world, but I don't feel the pressure to change because of it. Like change who I am to succeed. But the way you get treated sometimes, it makes you feel like a criminal, it makes you *think* you're a criminal, and then eventually you start believing it and it makes it easier to act like one.

Summary

Throughout the semester, the students' individualist ideology and the extent to which they allowed our work to challenge it and their social positioning relative to the issues under investigation influenced the levels of criticality they reached. All students, regardless of their social positioning, initially espoused an individualist worldview. Some, like Guillermo and Raul, quickly embraced a more critical lens, enthusiastically identifying root causes and critiquing the reasons why certain conditions and issues exist. Others, like Carrie and Roberto, resisted the challenge to a strictly individualist view our work posed but ultimately made the shift as they developed their critical questioning skills and began to identify more personally with the issues under investigation. Generally, the more privileged their social positioning (which tended to diminish their personal connection to the issues studied), the more the students struggled to critically examine a given social issue. Still, most of the students made shifts towards criticality in

their thinking, especially with regards to the issue under investigation during their YPAR-guided service-learning projects. This criticality is one half of the “critical agency” construction. Before students can feel like they can act to change unjust or inequitable social systems and structures, they have to be able to see those systems and structures and understand why they exist. In the next chapter I turn to the other half of the construction and examine how the students experienced agency during their work and the extent to which that agency was critical and why.

CHAPTER VII

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH AGENCY

To continue my analysis of the students' experiences with critical agency throughout their YPAR-guided service-learning experience, I now shift my focus to the “agency” element of that construction. In the previous chapter, I explored the extent to which the students developed their criticality—their ability to examine issues on their sociopolitical or structural levels and engage reflexively with those issues—during our semester together. This critical lens was key to framing both what they chose for their service work (the action element in their YPAR project) and how they experienced agency during that work. In this chapter, I first explore how the students experienced agency throughout the semester by looking at four components of critical agency—efficacy, empowerment, transformative resistance, and autonomy. I then analyze the extent to which the agency that students experienced was critical and why.

Students' Experiences with Critical Agency—Efficacy, Empowerment, Transformative Resistance, and Autonomy

Agency, the taking of considered and change-seeking actions, always requires that students feel both self-efficacious and empowered, but agency is not always understood through a critical lens. *Critical* agency refers to the taking of considered actions that are meant to discover and transform systems of power, privilege, and oppression. To facilitate critical agency, in addition to self-efficacy and empowerment students must also have the opportunity to practice transformative resistance and autonomy. This type of

agency is especially important for students who are otherwise marginalized in the school and society at large. By fostering critical agency in these students, we may be able to provide them with educational opportunities that are meaningful and empowering, re-engage them with the academic process, promote their school success without devaluing their home cultures, and offer a change-seeking critique of the ways in which these students are typically schooled in our public system (Romero et al, 2008; Irizzary, 2011). In each of the following sections, I discuss how the students experienced these four components of critical agency throughout the YPAR with evidence from their journal entries, transcripts of class discussions, focus group transcripts, and my field notes.

Students' Efficacy

Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as the belief that one has the ability to “successfully execute the behavior required to produce” certain outcomes (p. 193). Thus, in order to act as a change agent, the student must first feel like they personally have the skills and capabilities needed to make something happen. O’Donoghue (2006) expands the notion of efficacy beyond the Self, describing public efficacy as “the extent to which young people see themselves as capable of affecting or influencing both the [youth organization] and the broader community” (p. 232). Because of its higher order orientation, public efficacy, along with self-efficacy, is a key component of critical agency.

At the beginning of the semester, as we began to problem-pose on social issues, most of the students expressed generally feeling self-efficacious, that is, they felt that they had the tools they needed to affect certain changes in their community. Moreover, as

I described in chapter four, they developed a sense of self-efficacy as student-researcher throughout phases two and three of the YPAR-guided service-learning project which contributed to their feeling that they *could* take certain actions in their community. However, they did not necessarily feel like the changes they sought could actually come about or conceive of those changes on the sociopolitical (as opposed to personal or interpersonal) levels. In other words, while they felt self-efficacious, they did not all yet have a sense of public efficacy.

Joey, for example, stated in a journal entry that he had the ability to make changes in the world, but he limited those changes to the concrete and tangible, like building a park or a building. He also suggested that he could help feed the hungry by preparing food in a soup kitchen because, as a pizza shop cook, he was good at making food. Thus, Joey felt self-efficacious in the sense that he had useful skills that could be applied towards positive community actions. But these efforts were not necessarily critical. When asked whether he felt like he had the skills to change things on a sociopolitical level he replied, "I'd try to make big speeches and stuff like MLK did, but I think the world would never change like that." He did not feel like he had the ability to influence the wider community. He did not have a sense of public efficacy. Most students expressed similar feelings in their initial journal entries and our initial problem-posing discussions. While they felt like they could take actions in the world, indicating self-efficacy, they did not feel like those actions would matter, indicating a lack of public efficacy.

Other students, particularly when reflecting on their previous service-learning work raising funds and translating documents for a local health services organization, did

express that they felt able to “make a difference” with their skill set, which included their bilingualism, their knowledge of the Latin@ culture, and their enthusiasm and willingness to ask people for money. Jessica stated that “the money we raised did make a difference because we know they were able to buy supplies.” Alicia agreed: “I did make a difference in collecting money and informing people about [HIV].” Jessica and Alicia’s responses were representative of the students’ feelings about that service project. Most were able to give concrete examples of how their work helped (e.g. raising money=supplies for the organization) which gave them a sense of self-efficacy, but not public efficacy (which to be fair, was not the goal of that prior service-learning project). Like Joey, they struggled to understand how they could affect higher-order change (or whether higher orders even existed).

Another set of student responses further evidenced this initially undeveloped sense of public efficacy. Joaquín, Jessica, Juana, and Joey all problem-posed about racism and all answered “no” when asked if there was anything they could do to help solve that problem. But their response was not evidence of a lack of self-efficacy, but rather a lack of public efficacy born of their individualist mentality. While Juana did say that she could make a difference in the world, she did not think she could do anything to minimize racism because “tendria que cambiar los pensamientos de las personas y todos tenemos pensamientos diferentes [I’d have to change other people’s thoughts and everyone has different thoughts].” Her individualist mindset reduced racism to an individual’s thoughts, to which they were entitled and which were out of reach for Juana. Thus, in limiting racism to the personal, as opposed to sociopolitical or structural, level,

Juana also limited her efficacy. Jessica similarly stated that she was capable of making the world a better place, but “no hay una solucion que yo puedo hacer para cambiar a la gente. La gente hace lo que quiere. [there’s no solution that I can do to change people. People do what they want to do.]” Like Juana, influenced by an individualist ideology, Jessica only understood racism as an individual’s personal choice, which put it out of her control. Further exemplifying how their individualism diminished their senses of public efficacy, Joaquín stated that while he had many skills that he could use to better the world, those skills would be most likely for naught in a service project because “no se puede ayudar a alguien que no quiere ayudar a si mismo [I can’t help anyone who doesn’t want to help themselves].” Once again, the issue was personal choice. Joaquín felt unable to help others because those in need of help may not help themselves. Thus, while Joaquín felt self-efficacious, he did not feel like his skills could have a real impact on the world.

For some students, this split between feeling self-efficacious but not public efficacy continued through the end of their project, indicating that they may not have experienced agency as critically as I had hoped they would. For example, Jessica, who continued to work with the Health Project in our YPAR project, stated emphatically that her work (surveying the Spanish-speaking community about their knowledge of HIV, distributing information to them, and collecting funds for the organization) did not make any difference on the structural or interpersonal levels because “we didn’t raise enough money to do anything with.” Even in our final interview, though she acknowledged that their survey work would help the Health Project improve their future outreach in the

Latino community which could improve outcomes for that community, Jessica hesitated to equate that future use to the “difference” her work made stating, “But *we* won’t be doing that. It might happen because of us, but it isn’t *us* or really part of *our project*.” So while Jessica felt self-efficacious, describing herself as a liaison for the Health Project uniquely positioned to help because of her Spanish skills and insider community knowledge, she did not feel a sense of public efficacy.

Similarly, the Police Brutality group felt self-efficacious throughout their project, but not necessarily publically so. The following exchange occurred in our final focus group when I asked them what skills they had that would help solve the problem.

Guillermo: We can do stuff, like the video and our research and poems, like raising awareness, but like the cops still, like they’ve got to make a change within themselves.

[a chorus of nods and noises of agreement from the group]

Raul: And like we could protest and stuff, but there might be a riot like Baltimore and Ferguson.

Roberto: It won’t only take us to change the system, like we need more people. People in politics to agree with us.

The group unanimously felt that they had useful skills for solving the problem—their newly acquired research skills, their slam poetry and artistic talents, and their ability to combine them all into videos and posters that raised awareness and called for changes. But, like their classmates, they did not feel a sense of public efficacy. Partly, as evidenced in Guillermo’s assertion that they could do these things, but the cops still had to change themselves, their sense of helplessness was tied to a lingering tendency to

reduce structural issues to the personal level. Again, this individualist ideology, in which personal choices and thoughts are out of activism's purview, diminished their sense of public efficacy. However, for this group, the enormity of the issue at hand (which had continued to blow up around the country throughout our semester working together) coupled with our limited resources and timeframe may have also reduced the sense of public efficacy they felt, as evidenced by Roberto's statement that "It won't only take us to change the system, like we need more people. People in politics to agree with us." Instead of demonstrating an individualist ideology, this statement showed a more critical understanding of the issue and the layers of influence needed to affect the system as a whole.

Other students did feel a sense of both self and public efficacy by the conclusion of the project. The ESOL group clearly articulated their senses of self-efficacy at multiple points during the semester. For example, on their first reflection form after beginning their service, Carrie, María, and Ana jointly wrote:

We are uniquely positioned to help these kids and their parents because we are bilingual and know the struggles that come with that. We have experience getting through the ESOL program and elementary and middle schools. We also have the knowledge of math and reading and science and can really help the kids with their homework. We have practice tutoring from having little siblings and nieces and nephews and cousins.

Thus, the students were able to list multiple skills, some general and some unique to their social positioning, that made "making a difference" in their service possible.

In their final focus group, the students returned to skills and then indicated that they also felt like they would be able to influence the organizations/broader community

they were working within, in this case, the school system and the Center for Immigrant Services, which administered the Elmwood tutoring program in which they were serving. Regarding the school system, they reiterated how much more impactful their work could be if it were part of an on-going mentoring program coordinated across their high school and its feeder middle and elementary schools. They had written a letter to be sent to the school administrators and teachers presenting their research and work and encouraging these adults to change the structural barriers that prevented such a program from happening this semester. In the final focus group, Carrie and Ana expressed hope for that letter's impact:

Ana: Yeah, we need to get this into the schools. The letter makes a good case.

Carrie: Yeah, and if they let us do it...they might [the principal] is leaving and [the assistant principal] I think we have him on our side...we can keep doing this work next year if they'll change the rules.

The group's guarded expectation of success in making their case and convincing adult gatekeepers to change the rules indicated that they did have a sense of public efficacy. They felt that they could affect systemic changes.

Regarding the Elmwood tutoring partnership, the students highlighted in our final focus group one critique they had of that system and agreed to propose a solution to the adults in charge of the program. After discussing the importance of parent involvement in the kids' schooling, noting that parents at Elmwood were not meaningfully engaged in the tutoring/homework help sessions, and offering probable causes for that lack of engagement, Joey, María, Ana, and Carrie decided to talk to the coordinators and propose

that the tutors do more to explicitly invite the parents (who usually sit around the trailer) to actively participate alongside them during the sessions. They crafted their proposal and made a plan to present it. The enthusiasm and expectation of success with which they undertook this work indicated that they felt capable of changing this system, even though they had no formal power within it. This belief in their ability to impact the organizations/community within which they were working also evidenced that they felt both self and publically efficacious.

The ESOL group's sense of efficacy related to their simultaneous empowerment as part of the YPAR-guided service-learning project. Like all the students, they were encouraged not only to develop or recognize existing skill sets that *could* be used to affect change in the world but also to *use* them. In the following section, I examine how empowerment played out during the semester.

Students' Empowerment

In addition to feeling self- and publically-efficacious, in order to feel critically agentic, a student must also be empowered to use their skills to take change-seeking actions on the structural or social level. In the schooling context, critical empowerment requires that adult participants make space for “non-tokenized youth participation in decision making, a focus on facilitating critical consciousness through unearthing root causes of social problems, and socially-just social action informed by critical reflection” (Kohfeldt et al., 2011, p. 29). In other words, the traditional adult-over-youth power dynamic must shift towards a more egalitarian one in which the students have room to put meaningfully their feelings of efficacy to use.

Within our projects, the students had full creative control. The teacher and I repositioned ourselves as facilitators. We shared our skills with the group, teaching them qualitative research methods or video editing, for example. We used our community contacts and position as “university researcher” and “teacher” to facilitate their access to service or research opportunities. But we encouraged the students to follow the leads and take the actions they wanted to take and allowed them to make the critiques of systems they needed to make, even when those critiques included us and the systems we were a part of. Moreover, we expected the students to use their skills for social change—this expectation was upfront throughout the YPAR-guided service-learning project and influenced everything we did. The students knew there was both the space for and the expectation of change-seeking action in our classroom, even if it took them some time to believe us. As Carrie stated, “I guess we finally realized that we had permission to do stuff, not just complain about it, but try to change it.” María added,

And that you weren’t just going to do it for us, we had to. Like you said, ‘Get on the phone, go talk to [the assistant principal],’ and we were like, ‘Can we really do that, we’re kids here?’ But we did and we made things happen; well, we tried to anyway.

Similarly, Guillermo stated “I don’t think we made any real changes to the system, but you always made us feel like what we were doing *could*. Like ‘think bigger!’ It felt powerful.” Thus, the students felt empowered within the context of the project, even if they still felt limited by the school system and other social systems more broadly.

Students demonstrated throughout the semester that they were embracing this empowerment our project promoted. For example, the students in the ESOL group, even

after conducting their primary YPAR and service activities, continued to reflectively problem-pose and take systemic change-seeking actions without being told to or asking permission from the teacher or me. Similarly, during their qualitative investigation of community stakeholders' opinions on police brutality and racial profiling, Roberto, Jason, Raul, and Guillermo consistently designed and conducted surveys and wrote letters to community members following the curiosity of the group. I was called in to consult on the technology, the wording of a survey item, or for proofreading, but I was never asked for permission to pursue a line of inquiry. As Jason stated when asked in the final focus group whether they had felt empowered to make decisions or take actions during the project, "Yes, you trusted us to do it so we did." Guillermo and Roberto similarly replied, "We could have done so much more with more time or some money. That was the only thing that limited us." The initiative the students took indicated that they did feel empowered to follow their curiosity and plan and take actions, to put their efficacy to use.

Efficacy (especially self-efficacy) and empowerment (or at least some version of it) are required components of agency, critical or not. The critical lens requires specific understandings of these two terms, as discussed above, and also two additional elements—transformative resistance and autonomy. In the following sections, I explore these additional components before analyzing how critical the students' experiences with agency were overall.

Students' Resistance

Resistance is a way of coping with the limits one feels placed upon them by external forces. Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) posit that marginalized students often resist the systems that work to oppress them, but that their resistance may frequently be self-defeating or conformist. Self-defeating resistance refers to student's actions that reject rather than attempt to change the system and that simultaneously work to limit the student's own life chances. Conformist resistance, on the other hand, describes a student who internally rejects the system while continuing to operate within it. Neither of these forms of resistance work with critical agency because both imply an acceptance of the system itself. The student may reject it in some way, but that rejection is deeply personal and does nothing to attempt to alter the oppressive reality itself. Instead, transformative resistance channels the student's opposition to the systems that oppress them into actions that foster social and political change. In doing so, it may be both a catalyst for and result of critical agency.

Many of the students in our project embodied self-defeating and conformist resistance with regards to school and institutionalized racism at the start of the semester. Raul, Joey, and Guillermo each told stories about negative experiences with the SRO and teachers who they felt racially profiled them. Raul talked about getting suspended after he decided to return the glare he felt he always received from the SRO upon entering the school. All three talked about getting in trouble for non-compliance when they decided to rebel against perceived injustices. Guillermo, for example, received a multi-day suspension during our project for disobeying another teacher and going to the bathroom

after she had singled him out as not being allowed to go because he “might be selling drugs.”

This self-defeating resistance continued to emerge throughout the semester (both Joey and Guillermo served other suspensions for non-compliance and Guillermo also had an alcohol-related suspension), but the students became more critically reflexive about it. Towards the end of the semester, as the group compiled material for their video, the young men analyzed the risks of dialog with the SRO or other cops about their findings and suggestions:

Jason: We are trying to solve the problem, work on bigger levels, but some of this is too personal, like the SRO, he’s on us all the time, we say something to him, it might come back on us.

Raul: [jokingly] Or with another cop, we get shot.

Robert: Yeah, seriously though, there are risks.

Guillermo: When you put two people together with different ideas, sometimes that makes things better and sometimes worse. Especially, like when one of them is already over the other one. That’s a risk for the one underneath because there could be retaliation. All my experience with SROs, never had a good experience with them, why add wood to the fire? By saying the wrong thing or asking wrong questions. I don’t want to be prejudiced too, but I mean, I’m not sure he will listen.

Jason: But you get suspended anyway. Is it better to just get suspended for doing stupid things to get back at him or for trying to talk to him?

The students were essentially weighing the risks of engaging in an act of transformative resistance—sharing their findings in a dialog with the SRO and his colleagues (something they ultimately decided not to do). Jason’s final comment, pointing out that acts of self-defeating resistance, which they regularly engaged in, had similar risks, indicated that he

was beginning to see how just rebelling against the system might not be as effective at improving their lives as trying to change it could be.

Ultimately, this self-defeating resistance did shift towards a transformative resistance, at least within the context of the YPAR-guided service-learning project. The same experiences that had been (and may continue to be) the catalyst for rebellion elsewhere became their inspiration for the investigation, which led them to solutions for the problem that they disseminated to adult stakeholders via anonymous means. Trying to improve the discriminatory system that was limiting their life chances was the higher goal of the project. Even if they understood that their actual impact may be small or altogether ineffective without a larger group of allies in the fight, they still embraced their qualitative research and counter-storytelling as a means of transformative resistance.

Other students initially embodied a conformist resistance strategy, and like the students engaged in self-defeating resistance, by the end of the semester, most of them had developed the ability to critique it. In the early discussions, some students, while they admitted to feeling discriminated against personally or to having witnessed it happen to their friends, were determined to keep those negative experiences inside and not let it affect their school performance. Carrie, as a representative example of the conformist resisters, stated in our first discussion of the school-to-prison pipeline that “You can view school one of two ways... You can realize that what I do here matters and affects my life and it can be a game you play or you can just rebel and mess up.” Jessica similarly stated in our conversation about having to change an “ethnic” name in order to get a job that “I would do it. It wouldn’t change who I am inside, it would just be playing a game to

succeed. I wouldn't like it and it wouldn't be fair, but I would do it." In both cases, the students indicated that their preferred method for resisting unjust and oppressive forces acting on them was to conform and "play the game." Of note, Guillermo, Joey, and Raul all firmly indicated that that they would never change their name for a job and that, as Raul put it, "that job could suck it." But while three indicated that they would not conform to such an injustice, none of the students indicated in that activity that they would do anything to try to change system promoting the injustice of needing to adopt an Anglo name to succeed.

By the end of the semester, the students espousing conformist resistance tendencies had also begun to embrace a more transformational stance towards resistance and to critically examine the "game" that they were "playing." In their final focus group, Carrie, Ana, and María (and self-defeating resistor Joey) discussed the need for ESOL children to maintain their home language and have their home culture and language respected by the school. Ana mentioned the Native American boarding schools and drew a parallel between that extreme assimilationist ideology and the more subtle, but still damaging experiences they had had, like the ESOL teacher who had banned them from communicating in Spanish and the lack of courses throughout their schooling (other than this one) that taught them anything about their own history, literary traditions, or language. As María noted "You can't force them to be something they aren't to be successful, like that's kind of racist." Through this conversation, the students indicated that they were able to name part of the "game" they were playing as one of assimilation rooted in racism. Moreover, through their service action and their recommendations for

improving future practice, the ESOL group students demonstrated a new willingness to confront the injustices and problems that they could now name with the intent to *change* them instead of accept them or conform to them. Indicating this intent to make systemic improvements for future students, Joey said in his final reflection “I wish I had had someone doing this for me.” Thus, by the close of the project and at least within its confines, most of the students had shown a shift from self-defeating or conformist towards transformational resistance.

Students’ Autonomy

Woven into the notions of both resistance and empowerment, the final component of critical agency is autonomy. Autonomy refers to the student’s ability to make decisions and exert control over their environment. Within a critical orientation, this control exerted and these decisions made are not strictly self-serving but rather take into consideration the needs of and impact of those choices on others. According to Freire (1998), developing this kind of autonomy is central to both a liberating education and future democratic engagement. Thus, any schooling operating within a critical orientation must make space for students to nurture their autonomy, which Freire asserts happens through the practice of decision-making. In other words, students only learn to make better, more socially and personally responsible decisions when given the opportunity to do so. We cannot simply lecture to them or model for them the process—consider action, make decision, take action, evaluate consequences, repeat—but instead must clear the way for them to embrace it themselves. Developmentally-speaking, adolescents crave autonomy and some educational researchers (Clark et al., 2012; Eccles et al., 1993; Ozer & Wright,

2012) have asserted that the mismatch between youth readiness and desire for autonomy and the dearth of opportunities for such in schools may be a central reason why traditional schooling fails to engage and motivate youth, particularly youth of color.

Outside of the project context in their personal lives, students' senses of autonomy were split between the realities of their social positioning as youth in an adult-ruled world and their ideology of rugged individualism. When asked whether they felt in control of their own decision-making, most replied that they were not, pointing to parents and the adult-over-youth power dynamic as stifling their autonomy. Ana stated "en parte estoy en cargo de mi vida pero en parte creo que mis padres estan en carga de mi vida por que ellos son los que toman decisiones por mi [I'm partially in control of my life but partially so are my parents because they are the ones who make descisions for me]." Similarly, Jason stated that "mis padres son los que deciden [my parents are the ones who decide]." Of note, the students only saw their autonomy as limited by the parent-child power construct. No one mentioned how the *kinds* of decisions they could make and the *ways* that they could control their environment may be limited by social forces like race, socioeconomic status, immigration status, or gender.

A few students, however, asserted that they did have full control over their decision-making. María stated "estoy encargo de mi vida, yo no voy a dejar a otros controlar mi vida por mi [I'm in charge of my life, I'm not going to let others control my life for me]." Roberto, like María, felt himself to be in total control over his own decision-making. These early assertions of total control over their own choices were consistent with their other early assertions that personal choice was the only driving force

in each person's life (and thus, social ills were really simple problems of people making poor decisions).

Of note, during our first problem-posing sessions, even the students who felt limited by their parents or teachers in their decision-making were quick to place the responsibility for an individual's choices solely on that individual:

Roberto: Yeah, you can't force somebody to do something...Even in a utopia...there going to be problems...you can't force people to do things. [all nod in agreement]

Joaquín: So we can make our own path.

Me: But if nothing anyone does affects you and nothing you do affects others...

Carrie: They are going to give you life lessons and you are going to take it or not. Or try to get in your way or help you, but well...It's all up to you.

María: If they say or do something to you, that's still your choice what you do.

While they admitted that others could try to influence you, the general sentiment was that each person was an independent being making choices in a vacuum. And because they did not believe that anyone's choices could have any impact on any other person's choices, they felt deeply autonomous, but not critically so. In other words, their individualist world view inspired a sense of control over their lives (read: choices), but they felt no responsibility for those choices in the sociopolitical sense—impacts were isolated on the personal level. This lack of criticality in their sense of autonomy meant that many of them initially felt no responsibility to the world at large or to help others. Thus their sense of agency was bolstered by their feelings of autonomy, but that agency was strictly personal, not critical.

When asked about the level of control students had over their decision-making at school, all responded that in terms of selecting what and how they study or learn, this experience was the first time they had had that opportunity. They also all indicated that they appreciated and took advantage of that opportunity, practicing their autonomy throughout the project phases. Jessica's response was representative of the group's sentiment:

School would be way better if we had more service-learning and things like this where we got to pick a topic and investigate it...[without the teacher telling you what to do]...it might be harder, but it is better because then you get more interested and motivated and want to do it.

Her response indicated that she appreciated the freedom to guide her own learning that the YPAR-guided service-learning afforded, and that she found the experience to be challenging, interesting, and motivating because of this freedom. Thus, while the students may have felt varying degrees of autonomy in their personal lives, within the context of the project, they recognized the opportunity to practice autonomy and what the benefits were of doing so.

Students' Critical Agency—Linking Efficacy, Empowerment, Resistance, and Autonomy

Throughout the project and at least within its confines, the students indicated that they felt empowered, self- and eventually publically efficacious, and autonomous. Many of them were able to shift, at least within the context of the project, away from self-defeating or conformist resistance and towards a more transformative mode of opposition. Thus, overall, the students did experience agency during our YPAR-guided

service-learning project, but the extent to which that agency was critical in nature shifted over time and varied among students. Examining the orientations of their considered and change-seeking actions offered another point of evidence for how students experienced critical agency across the project.

Early in the semester, the students' senses of agency tended towards the personal (helping themselves) and interpersonal (helping another person or small group) levels. Exemplifying this tendency, in one journal entry, we asked the students to comment on whether they felt they had a responsibility to try to make the world a better place. Some of their responses indicated that while they felt self-efficacious (capable of acting to make things better) they did not care to do so, reflecting an "if it's not my fault, it's not my problem" sentiment. Ana, for example, stated "No es mi responsibilidad de intentar de mejorar el mundo o ayudar a personas [It is not my responsibility to try to make the world a better place or help people]." Though she went on to temper that statement saying, "todos debemos de ayudar a unos a otros...no es una responsibilidad sino algo que debemos hacer [we all should help each other...it's not a responsibility but rather something we should do]." She thus drew a distinction between a responsibility, which she understood as an obligation that one must fulfill, and something we should do, but that isn't required. She felt that she *could* help (a sense of agency), but her agency was not critical because she felt no responsibility for anything other than her own self-improvement.

Similarly, Joaquín believed that he *could* help change the world, thus indicating a sense of agency, but like his classmates, he limited the scope of his reach stating "hay

unas cosas en el mundo que son afuera de mi alcance [there are some things in the world out of my reach].” However, these problems out of his reach were not higher order, less tangible issues that he felt too small to address. Rather, Joaquín stated that “no se puede ayudar a alguien que no quiere ayudar a si mismo [I can’t help people who don’t want to help themselves].” Once again, his individualist ideology prevented him from feeling like he could extend his agency beyond the personal level. Because he saw each man as an island, he had no power to help others or change things beyond himself. Other students echoed this sense that they had no responsibility to anyone other than themselves throughout the first half of the semester, and that while helping was nice, it was not something that they had to do nor was it functional—as Nick stated, “I could try [to do something to improve the situation], but they are the ones in the wrong who have to change, so what’s the point?” Thus, while some of the students felt capable of taking considered, change-seeking actions, those actions were limited to benefiting/affecting themselves. They were not critical.

Other students did extend their sense of agency beyond the personal level, but they too stopped short of critical, limiting their considered, change-seeking actions to the interpersonal level. For example, María did not feel like she had a responsibility to try to make the world a better place, though she agreed that helping individuals was good, stating “si podemos mejorar nuestra comunidad pero a mejorar el mundo eso es mucho [yes we can help our community but making the world a better place, that’s a lot].” María’s distinction demonstrated that she did not feel *critically* agentic—addressing the “world’s” problems was too much to ask—but she did see herself as capable of smaller,

more isolated interpersonal actions. Jason also saw making the attempt to better his community as his responsibility, stating “quiero ayudar a la comunidad hispana a tener mejores oportunidades aqui en los EEUU [I want to help the Hispanic community have better opportunities here in the U.S.],” but like María, he felt like changing the world was too much, “yo podria intentar a la comunidad alrededor de mi pero no es mi responsibilidad ayudar al mundo completo [I could try to help in the community around me, but it is not my responsibility to help the whole world].”

Throughout the first half of the semester, students routinely limited their senses of agency to the personal and interpersonal levels as evidenced above. But by the end of the project, more of the students saw their considered, change-seeking actions as having the potential to affect systemic or social changes, as evidenced by the ESOL group’s enthusiastic efforts to change the systems preventing their project from reaching its full potential and the Police Brutality group’s assertion that, while they needed a bigger coalition to make a substantive difference, their work was aimed at sociopolitical change. Several factors influenced this shift and the extent to which it took place for some students more so than others.

Factors Affecting How Students Experienced Critical Agency

Several factors influenced the extent to which the agency that students experienced was critical. First, their individualist ideology, as referenced in previous sections, continued to influence the level of criticality in their work. Second, the often-intangible, long-term, and incremental nature of systemic change made it hard for students used to making concrete “differences” with their service work to comprehend.

Third, when it came to a sense of social empowerment or transformative resistance, both central to a more critical version of agency, fear and risk mitigated the kinds of actions some students were willing to take. Finally, their self-identification with the issue also affected how critically agentic they felt during the research and service phases of the project.

Individualist Ideology and Critical Agency

As evidenced throughout the data, individualism prevailed as the students' guiding ideology. And while at points it impeded their willingness to engage with subject matter on a critical level, it also gave most of them deep senses of self-efficacy, autonomy, and empowerment. They consistently reported believing (even if their realities did not match their belief) that they were ultimately in control of their own lives, decisions, and actions. Indeed an ideology of individualism can have a positive effect on agency—without a degree of self-reliance, self-esteem, and believe in one's capacity and opportunity, a person may be unlikely to feel efficacious or agentic—but too much can create a victim-blaming or selfish mentality (Greene, 2011), as we saw in many of our problem-posing sessions.

Because they understood each Self essentially as an island, most students initially hesitated to take any responsibility for helping to improve or resolve the social problems they identified, preferring to deflect the responsibility onto other individuals they considered to be “at fault” for the social ill. Roberto's response in our first problem-posing discussion exemplified this viewpoint:

Me: If you think that this is a problem, who should fix it?

Roberto: The person themselves! [chorus of “yes!”]

Moreover, for sociopolitical issues like racism, the students’ individualist ideology prevented them from feeling any sense of agency for addressing that problem. Their individualist tendency to reduce those problems to personal choice or thought meant that (a) they *could* not do anything to solve the problem because another person’s thoughts were out of their purview and (b) they *should* not do anything to interfere with or try to alter another person’s thoughts or beliefs because we were each entitled to those differences of opinion. Thus, at the beginning of the semester, the students’ individualist ideology severely restricted their sense of critical agency.

As the semester progressed, however, we found that the personal agency supported by individualism could be leveraged towards critical agency as the students’ overall ability to critically engage with issues increased. As Greene (2011) argued, “large degrees of self-reliance, self-esteem, and opportunities for individual betterment are necessary for citizens’ social participation and well-being,” and when “aligned with social consciousness, individualistic values have also fueled advocacy for social justice, human dignity, and responsible individual freedoms” (p. 121). Once students began to make these alignments as they raised their critical consciousness around social issues, they also began to shift the orientation of their agency away from strictly personal or interpersonal levels (though these also rightly remained) towards a critical level. As previously described, by the end of the semester all groups articulated their impacts as personal, interpersonal, *and* structural.

Additionally, the personal sense of efficacy, empowerment, and autonomy bolstered by their individualism may have also shielded some students from the feelings of helplessness or hopelessness that sometimes accompany movements for critical change. If their efforts failed, they located the reason for that failure externally. It did not affect their self-image of themselves as agentic. The ESOL students, for example, even though they recognized that their efforts might fail or might not improve the situation for them personally, still undertook their efforts to change the system with gusto, believing that they were capable of affecting such change and had the right or power to try and do so. And like the Police Brutality group, they saw a point to their work and felt empowered by it even if it ultimately yielded no concrete results.

Intangibility and Long Timelines and Critical Agency

Cahill et al. (2008) and Cannella (2008) remind YPAR practitioners that because YPAR's action goals are higher order, they may not be fully realized within the confines of one project. Instead, the actions taken in YPAR should be seen as a step in a long-term process of change. Indeed, social and systemic change is long-term and incremental. It can be hard to see, much less quantify, the impact of such work. As the students so often pointed out, attempts at changing people's hearts and minds produce relatively intangible impacts. As such, even if they recognize the long-term value of their work, students participating in YPAR projects may still feel helpless, ineffective, frustrated, or "too small" when trying to affect systemic change, and these feelings may diminish their sense of critical agency.

As evidenced in their early reflections on previous service work and senses of efficacy, the students indicated that they preferred personal- and interpersonal-oriented service because they found it easier to quantify their effects. Overcoming the narrowing of scope that this preference promoted was a challenge throughout the YPAR work and into the service planning phase. Students consistently focused on concrete actions that had personal or interpersonal impacts instead of actions that were harder to understand as “service” but had social or systems level potential effects.

The ESOL group worked through this hesitancy to work on critical levels by designing a project that specifically had interpersonal and systemic effects. They were able to satisfy their need for concrete impacts through the act of tutoring and mentoring, which fulfilled their interpersonal goals. Then, partially because of the problems they ran into trying to implement their project as originally designed, they embraced a more critical agency as they tried to change the system that blocked them from having the bigger impact they wanted to make. The Police Brutality group worked through their hesitancy by embracing counter-storytelling as an action and, as Guillermo said, “getting the word out and putting the pressure on,” instead of trying to design some kind of concrete service act related to their topic. While they did not feel like their work had any impact that they could label as “effective,” they still felt critically agentic because they understood that it *could* have an impact and was one part of a bigger movement.

However, for the HIV group, the lack of a big, tangible impact diminished their overall sense of agency with regards to the project. During the service planning and execution phases, Jessica repeatedly struggled to understand the potential impact of her

work beyond her ability to raise money, stating at one point as they planned an awareness-raising event for their neighbors, “I just don’t see the point in this. They aren’t going to give money. And what good is it doing to give them information? They probably won’t even listen to us. It won’t change anything really.” Because she only grudgingly admitted that their work could have a long-term impact on how local organizations conduct HIV outreach in the Spanish-speaking community, Jessica may have not developed a sense of critical agency to the same extent as her classmates, largely due to her continued resistance to engaging in work with intangible or long-term effects.

Fear/Risk and Critical Agency

While the Police Brutality group was willing to shift their understanding of “service” to accommodate a less concrete, more critical form of action, they did struggle to fully embrace their critical agency out of fear or a hesitancy to take on the risks involved with a more embodied form of activism. As evidenced in several of the quotes I previously shared, the students worried about the repercussions they might suffer if they took a more personal or active approach to their research and to delivering their message. When surveying law enforcement, for example, they insisted on remaining anonymous, designing their survey on an online tool and filtering it through my email. When it came to their actions, they opted out of a dialog with the SRO, for example, and declined to go to a city council meeting, citing in both cases that they were afraid that they might end up drawing dangerous attention to themselves or their families (many of whom were undocumented). They chose to present their work through a video and poster, neither of which contained specific identifiers (names, faces, location names) to protect their

anonymity. But the protection afforded by this activism-at-a-distance came at the expense of potentially more meaningful engagement with those whose hearts, minds, and policies they were trying to change. It may have also reduced their sense of critical agency in that it limited the kinds of actions they felt safe to take when trying to affect systemic change.

The other groups, by virtue of their less-inflammatory topics, contended less with fear or risk-avoidance during their investigation and action phases.

Self-Identification with Issue and Critical Agency

As with their general ability to engage critically with a topic, the extent to which the students self-identified with the topic they studied positively impacted the level of criticality evident in their sense of agency surrounding it. Personally identifying with the topic raised the stakes of their work for those students. For the Police Brutality group, these raised stakes contributed to the risk factor which limited their critical agency. However, these higher stakes simultaneously increased the students' desire to affect systemic change.

The ESOL students, all of whom deeply personally identified with their research and service, were eager to affect systemic change, seeing it as the only way to really help improve the ESOL experience for current and future students. They noted that while the interpersonal work they did was useful, its impact was limited, which led them to embrace a more critical agency in the hope of creating long-term change. Similarly, the members of the Police Brutality group who most closely connected their lived experiences with the topic embraced the need to work for systemic change more fully than those who felt less personally affected. Guillermo and Raul, for example, while

worried about repercussions, were more willing to consider embodied activism, like protesting or taking their work to slam poetry shows, than were Roberto and Joaquín.

The HIV group, on the other hand, did not have a personal connection to their topic. They chose it out of academic interest—they both hope to pursue nursing as a future career—and because they had previously learned about the need in our city for a stronger HIV outreach program in the Spanish-speaking community. Jessica, while she cared about the outcome of her project, never fully embraced her work as being part of a bigger, long-term process of change that would have ultimately positive effects on the community and issue as a whole. She consistently expressed that she only felt like she was making a difference when she worked one-on-one with someone with HIV or when she raised money for the organization, both of which could be considered interpersonal agency.

Roberto, Jessica, and Joaquín all indicated in the journal entry in which they described why they chose their topic that their reasons were born of a desire for personal fulfillment or to make a difference in another person's life. Roberto, for example, stated that “El tema no me afecta personalmente pero me interesa [the topic doesn't personally affect me, but it does interest me].” Jessica made a similar statement, “No es personal, pero es interesante y quiero ayudar a los que tienen HIV tener una vida mejor. Also I want to be a nurse so it might help me in my career [It's not personal, but it is interesting and I want to help people with HIV have a better life...].” It is possible that their focus on personal and interpersonal goals, coupled with a lack of self-identification with the topic, made taking considered, change-seeking actions on the systemic level less appealing to

them. Whereas other students articulated personal fulfillment or interpersonal-oriented reasons for choosing their topics, the self-identification they also felt may have contributed to their ability/willingness to explore the issue more critically, and in turn, made them more likely to want to make bigger, possibly longer-lasting systemic changes.

Summary

At least within the confines of the project, most of the students experienced some sense of critical agency. During our work, their feelings of efficacy, empowerment, transformative resistance, and autonomy coupled with their developing critical thinking skills produced outcomes for these students similar to those that other YPAR and service-learning researchers have found, including increased motivation and academic engagement and a more affirmative sense of their own social identities (Kohfeldt et al., 2011; Ozer & Wright, 2012; Van Sluys, 2010). Indeed developing a sense of critical agency may be useful for students, particularly those marginalized in their school context, for future academic success, but perhaps more importantly, it is also necessary for their future as social justice-oriented, democratic citizens (Cahill et al., 2008).

Beane and Apple (2007) describe democratic citizens as those who value the sharing of ideas; believe in their ability to work together for a better world; can critically reflect on social issues; are concerned with and work for the welfare of individuals, the common good, and minority rights and dignity; and create institutions that sustain this way of life. At its core, our YPAR-guided service-learning project was trying to foster democratic citizens—youth who now and as they grow will be willing and able to think critically about their world and feel agentic enough to try and change it for the better. In

our last session together, Guillermo and those in the ESOL group expressed their desire and intent to continue with the service work they began during our projects so as to try and make the higher order changes they had envisioned. I hope they do and that the sense of critical agency they developed during our project continues to grow and carry them into the future as democratic citizens.

CHAPTER VIII

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

This project sought to create a space within a core, public high school classroom where students otherwise marginalized in their schooling experience could develop and exercise their critical agency. By blending YPAR, whose critical youth studies orientation makes it a ready vehicle for fostering critical agency but also a counter-cultural, political, and thus potentially dangerous classroom practice, with an institutionally-promoted service-learning program, we were able to fully integrate into the Spanish for Native Speakers class a project that supported the curricular learning goals alongside the students' development of critical thinking skills, civic engagement, and agency.

In this chapter, I address the implications of this project and its limitations. First, I summarize the implications of fostering students' critical agency in core classroom settings and offer several recommendations for educators looking to design similar projects. I then discuss the study's implications for the future practice of service-learning and YPAR—specifically, how a service-learning lens benefits YPAR and how YPAR can help service-learning address three main critiques that practice faces from critical scholars. Finally, I discuss the limitation of this study and offer suggestions for future research.

Implications Regarding Fostering Students' Critical Agency

For educators working from social justice-oriented and critical paradigms, the academic, social, and political implications of fostering critical agency make it an important goal for all students, but perhaps particularly for minoritized youth whose academic and socioeconomic opportunities are limited by social and political systems of power. Developing an ability to think critically is not only a cross-disciplinary academic skill that promotes school success, but students who can critically analyze their own social positioning and the systems at play around them may be better able to act in ways that counter their (and others') marginalization through democratic and civic participation. This critical agency is characterized by the merger of critical thinking skills with a sense of self- and public efficacy, empowerment, autonomy, and transformative resistance.

YPAR studies have demonstrated that practice's potential for promoting empowerment, autonomy, and critical thinking skills in all students, but particularly marginalized youth, which in turn increases their motivation and academic engagement (Irizzary, 2011; Morrell, 2008; Romero et al., 2008). Moreover, these studies have shown that doing YPAR work allows marginalized youth to reframe their socially devalued or oppressed identities as positives. In doing so, YPAR work has a sociopolitical as well as academic impact—it can create a more democratically engaged, social justice-oriented citizenry. Similarly, service-learning research indicates that student participants enhance their senses of agency (Berkas, 1997; Conley & Hamlin, 2009; Yates & Youniss, 1999) and develop self-efficacious and academic skills (Arrington, 2010; Terry & Panter,

2011), though most of those studies understand agency and efficacy in an individualist rather than critical sense.

My research reinforced all of these previous findings. Students like Raul, Joey, and Guillermo engaged deeply in our project, developing cross-disciplinary academic, literacy, and research skills and experiencing classroom successes that they had not found in other school spaces. Many students found transformative rather than self-defeating ways to resist the discrimination and marginalization they experienced in their school. Also, during their work on the projects, most students came to see their bilingualism, their “Hispanic-ness,” their immigrant experiences, and their youth affirmatively instead of viewing them as liabilities or deficiencies. Many expressed their intentions to continue their action and advocacy work after the study concluded, indicating that they may have developed an on-going sense of civic or democratic engagement.

But different from most of the previous studies on YPAR and service-learning’s impacts, our project demonstrated that these outcomes can be achieved *within* a core classroom setting alongside mandated curriculum and within institutional guidelines. For teachers who want to create a space for fostering students’ critical agency within their own classrooms, I offer four recommendations based on our experiences.

Recommendation One: Harness the Positive Elements of Individualism

The schooling culture, and indeed the dominant culture in the United States, privileges individualism, but in order for students to develop critical agency, they must first develop a willingness to explore social issues beyond the personal level. In our experience, the students’ deeply-seated individualist ideology was a major source of

resistance to such critical thinking. Moreover, it initially diminished their senses of critical agency because they only and firmly situated the causes and the solutions for social ills in the affected individual rather than in broader systems and socioeconomic and political power dynamics. Thus, they felt powerless to change things and disinclined to try.

However, their individualist ideology also afforded students a (perhaps overestimated) sense of autonomy and self-efficacy. They felt powerless to change others or change the conditions producing social problems, indicating a lack of public efficacy or critical agency, but they always expressed feeling personally powerful and able to make their own decisions and control their own actions (even if many of them were initially unwilling to unpack the structural conditions that may be working to limit them). While at first this hyper-focus on the Self impeded our work as students clung to the “personal choice” narrative to avoid critically exploring social issues, ultimately their senses of autonomy and self-efficacy provided a foundation for empowerment that we were able to convert into a more critical agency. In other words, as Greene (2008) implies in his discussion of individualism’s relationship to civic engagement, once they developed a critical lens for examining social conditions, they were able to harness their senses of self-efficacy and personal autonomy for social, in addition to individual, change. In order to help them make this shift, we had to find ways to support students’ critical thinking. The following three recommendations attend to how we changed our classroom practice to better foster this criticality.

Recommendation Two: Create Space for Curiosity-Led Learning and Autonomy

The teacher and I believed, as Freire (1998) asserts, that any classroom designed to promote criticality and democratic engagement in students must be a space in which students can practice their autonomy and follow their curiosity. Because YPAR is grounded in such ideals, within the YPAR-guided service-learning project, students had full control over their lines of inquiry, methods, presentation designs, and service actions. We participated as co-researchers and facilitators, consciously shifting the teacher-over-student power dynamic to a more democratic one. But because we sought to create an entire course, not just a project, that embodied these ideals, we also designed non-project-related activities and fostered a classroom culture that allowed students to practice autonomy and curiosity-led learning in a low-stakes environment.

We encouraged curiosity-led learning and autonomy in classroom activities by inviting students to brainstorm and select the topics through which the teacher would deliver the explicit Spanish language, literature, and cultural instruction. Using their input and what we knew about their lived experiences from demographic data and personal conversations, the teacher and I were able to choose readings, videos, songs, and activities with which the students could personally identify and which played to their interests and strengths. We also used materials that the students themselves had suggested and gave them choices for how they presented their work. We were able to give students more voice in our course topic and material selection because our state mandated curriculum focused primarily on language skill development rather than on predetermined language content. Thus, we could teach all of those skill requirements

through whatever vehicle we chose and still be playing by the rules, and we decided to collaborate with the students in choosing the vehicles.

With the constantly changing curriculum tide, there are no guarantees that such freedom will exist in the future, nor does it necessarily exist now in all content areas or in all local contexts. Often teachers are beholden to certain textbooks or interdepartmental pacing guides that do require that they cover specific topics, literature, or vocabulary. In such a situation, teachers may not be able to let students have so much say in the course content. However, there may be space within and across the mandated units for some curiosity-led learning and student autonomy. For example, teachers could give students choices for how they demonstrate their learning throughout the units, constantly relate the content to their daily lives, and/or incorporate student-led research and service activities like our YPAR-guided service-learning project into the overall course scheme.

In addition to curricular or content adjustments, making space for students to practice autonomy and curiosity-led learning involves a restructuring of the student-teacher dynamic. In other words, teachers must also adjust how they “manage” the classroom. In a classroom that supports students’ autonomy, the focus is on the community working together to create a space where each member can live up to their potential but also take into account the needs of others. We must trust our students to make considered decisions that take into account personal, interpersonal, and social impacts. We must trust them to learn from their blunders *and* from their successes. Such trust requires relationship-building between all members of the class community.

In our case, the students all had pre-existing, long-term personal relationships, so most of our community-building work centered on developing trust between the youth and adults (the teacher and I). We built this trust through honest dialog and genuine care and interest in one another's personal lives as well as our academic ones. We practiced active listening skills. We joked together and got angry about current events together. We also modeled making considered decisions and reflecting on the outcomes both so that the students would have examples for what we expected of them and also in the interest of transparency and shared power. In other words, by talking openly about how and why we made certain choices in class and what we learned from the results, we invited student feedback and encouraged their active participation in deciding how the class and the research projects ran.

In addition to building caring and trusting relationships, teachers trying to create more democratic classrooms can co-construct classroom guidelines and procedures, use group conflict resolution rather than teacher-administered punishment, and reorganize their physical spaces to allow students to collaborate or work independently as needed and assume the postures that they find most suited to their work. This kind of classroom structure can be built regardless of curriculum mandates.

Recommendation Three: Focus on Process, Not Product

In addition to expressing genuine interest in their knowledge and lived experiences and democratizing classroom policies and procedures, the teacher and I encouraged student curiosity, criticality, and autonomy by focusing on the research and learning *process* rather than the *product*. For example, while ultimately the teacher did

assign a grade to their project work, we did not use grades to coerce participation at each step. Thus, we made room for students to try and fail and learn from those failures in a low-stakes environment (compared to the high-stakes, grade-oriented focus of other school spaces). This formative orientation allowed students to feel comfortable practicing their autonomy, thinking critically and sharing those thoughts, and following their curiosity, even when their ideas or actions led to dead ends. As I discussed in earlier chapters, the students recognized and embraced this freedom and learned new information and new skills because of it.

Recommendation Four: Explore Topics with which They Personally Identify

Throughout the project, we noted that student motivation and academic engagement increased with their personal connections to and genuine interests in the topics. Moreover, we found that the most effective way to encourage students' critical thinking about social issues was to explore topics that personally affected them. We observed that the more closely related to their lived experience the topic, the more likely students were to be willing to unpack that issue's causes and solutions on personal, interpersonal, and structural levels. Their intimate prior knowledge of such topics facilitated this deeper critical engagement, and the personal connections reduced their inclination toward victim-blaming (a manifestation of their individualist ideology) making them more likely to want to understand the nuances of such issues and find structural solutions.

As I noted in the second recommendation, finding ways to teach to and from the students' lived experiences can be challenging if the curriculum or departmental pacing

guides mandate specific content or materials. But I contend that in most cases, we can still often frame our content in ways that connect to student's worlds. For example, math, sciences, and psychology courses that teach statistics could incorporate examples of how statistics and quantitative data are salient to the students' lives (e.g. standardized testing results, school demographic data) and the implications of such data on their opportunities. History teachers could teach explicitly the connections between historical and current events, and language teachers could encourage thematic links between classic and contemporary literature/poetry/rap/music.

Creating our classroom space was not without challenges, as I explicated in the previous chapters, but for us it was worth doing. Our approach of blending YPAR with service-learning and then fully integrating that project into the course curriculum (or more accurately, finding ways to teach the curriculum through that project) is just one way social justice, critically-minded teachers could set up a classroom practice that fosters their students' critical agency. The above suggestions—embracing the positive elements of individualism, promoting student autonomy and curiosity-led learning, focusing on process instead of product, and exploring topics with which students personally identify—would still apply to other pedagogies or methods such a teacher might use. But for those specifically interested in service-learning and YPAR within classroom settings, in the following sections I attend to the implications our work may have for combining the approaches and how doing so may address other scholars' criticisms of both practices.

Implications Regarding Combining Service-Learning and YPAR

While few practitioners appear to be explicitly blending service-learning and YPAR methods, we found that in doing so, our project was able to overcome some of the common criticisms and challenges that each practice faces alone. YPAR faces criticism from those who find its implementation as a classroom practice too political, too counter-cultural, and too difficult to authentically and completely conduct with inexperienced student researchers in a school setting. Critically-oriented scholars have also offered serious critiques of service-learning and its potential to reinforce rather than challenge social injustice. Our work demonstrated how a practice that blended the two methods could help each address these criticisms. In this section, I first discuss how a service-learning orientation can benefit YPAR, particularly when conducted within an institutional setting. I then turn to three critiques of service-learning and examine how a YPAR framework helped us overcome criticisms.

How YPAR Benefits from Service-Learning

YPAR is by itself a successful practice that offers youth, particularly marginalized youth, a vehicle for acquiring academic skills, countering their own (and others') marginalization, and participating democratically in their school and community (Irizzary, 2011; Morrell, 2008; Romero et al., 2008, Van Sluys, 2010). But despite the public education system's continued focus on closing the "achievement gap" and developing new intervention strategies for marginalized "at-risk" youth, YPAR remains uncommon in public classroom practice, likely due to its overt social justice and critical orientations. In many school settings in the United States (including my own) such theoretical frameworks are deeply counter-cultural. The teacher and I were afraid at

several moments during our work that if we were “found out” by more neoliberally-oriented parents or staff that we would be shut down. In a state that has recently eliminated tenure protections for its teachers, going so deeply against the dominant ideological grain can be dangerous to one’s career.

Unlike YPAR, service-learning is relatively popular in K-16 schooling and is increasingly seen as a potential intervention strategy for “at-risk” youth. Because of its institutional acceptance (and often less-critical ideological orientations), one thing that service-learning offers YPAR is an entry point into the school system. We found that calling our project “YPAR-guided service-learning” made it seem less radical to stakeholders who may have objected to YPAR as a stand-alone practice. Those stakeholders promoted and understood service-learning, and so by presenting our critical pedagogy as a version of that practice, it was more recognizable and palatable to them.

When scholars warn of YPAR’s counter-cultural nature, however, they are speaking of more than its critical ideology and political purpose. YPAR is also counter-cultural in that it democratizes schooling’s traditional adult-over-youth power dynamics and rejects the banking method (Freire, 1998) in favor of autonomous and curiosity-led learning. It can be quite challenging to embrace those pedagogical and practical tenets within traditional school settings where regulations regarding teacher-student interaction and responsibilities, curriculum and teaching styles, and assessment and grade protocols abound. I elaborated on the challenges of institutionalizing YPAR in chapter four. Here, I will offer specifically how the district’s service-learning program helped us institutionalize our YPAR process.

Critics of institutionalized YPAR note that adults often overrun the youth as researchers because they fail to scaffold them through that process (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010; Phillips et al., 2010). Additionally, in my previous experiences with YPAR, I have found that students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders have difficulty understanding YPAR's action element because it tends to be less concrete. Actions oriented towards systemic change tend to be on-going or somewhat ephemeral, illustrated by Cahill et al.'s (2008) description of YPAR action as youth "seeing with different eyes" (p. 115) or Cannella's (2008) description of youth envisioning an "imagined but possible future" (p. 205).

Blending YPAR and service-learning helped us to address these two concerns. While I would have deliberately designed our project to scaffold students through every phase of research regardless, the "Investigation, Preparation and Planning, Action, Reflection, Presentation" (IPARD) process that our district mandated service-learning projects follow provided us with a framework for doing so. Though the IPARD process often worked against itself because of its bureaucratic idiosyncrasies, as I described in detail in chapter four, the district's materials did give us a starting point for scaffolding the students through each research phase. Moreover, in making "Investigation" and "Presentation" official components of service-learning, IPARD helped the students and other stakeholders accept the research as an integral part of the service-learning process instead of something ancillary to the actual "work" of "service."

Additionally, while fitting our less concrete actions into the district's definition of "service" at times required creativity, framing that "action" as "service" did help

stakeholders understand better what we meant by “action” in the YPAR construction. Moreover, while each group did take actions aimed at higher order changes and begin to “see with different eyes,” consistent with YPAR’s tenets, merging the practice with service-learning encouraged us to take concrete actions, as well. These actions aimed at ameliorating current conditions (e.g., tutoring, fundraising)—the typical focus of service-learning “service”—coupled with the higher order actions (e.g., letter writing, the HIV group’s research for the Health Project)—YPAR’s typical focus—produced a service action phase that was more layered and impactful than either would have been alone. While some strictly service-learning or YPAR projects undoubtedly also attend to personal, interpersonal, and higher order change in their service/action phases, our blended approach explicitly called us to do so.

In sum, we called our project “YPAR-guided service-learning” and indeed YPAR tended to inform our service-learning practice more so than service-learning influenced our interpretation of YPAR. But service-learning, in structuring and enriching our action phase and by providing institutionally understood and accepted links between research and service and “cover” for a critical pedagogy, also benefited YPAR. In the next section, I take up the inverse and discuss how YPAR helped us to create a more social justice-oriented, critical service-learning practice.

How Service-Learning Benefits from YPAR

In this section, I elaborate on the implications for service-learning practice of using a YPAR framework. These findings have practical implications for educators looking to replicate our blending of the practices. They also contribute to the on-going

discussions among service-learning scholars regarding the dangers and possibilities of service-learning as a social justice-oriented, critical pedagogy. In each subsection, I examine a critique of service-learning offered by social justice-oriented scholars and discuss how YPAR helped us attend to that critique.

Notions of “service” within service-learning. The first critique focuses on the form “service” takes within the service-learning construction. As discussed in detail in the literature review chapter, service framed as charity or volunteerism undermines social justice goals because it reinforces deficit ideologies and existing social hierarchies and focuses too heavily on ameliorating conditions while leaving the social systems that produce those conditions unquestioned and thus unchanged (Hyttén, 2001; Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Sheffield, 2011). Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) three types of citizenship (personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented) offer a framework for unpacking these criticisms of service actions. In Westheimer and Kahne’s (2004) example of the canned food drive, personally responsible citizens donate food, participatory citizens organize the drive, and justice-oriented citizens ask why hunger exists and look for systemic causes and solutions. When service activities remain on the personally responsible or even the participatory level, students’ negative perceptions or stereotypes of those being served may not be challenged and may in fact be reinforced as they (the servers) see themselves as more capable or even morally superior to those in the community they serve (Stenhouse & Jarrett, 2012).

The critical service-learning practitioners (Mitchell et al., 2012; Marullo & Edwards, 2000; Sheffield, 2011) who offer this critique have also offered suggestions for

overcoming it, as discussed in the literature review chapter. Based on our findings, I would add guiding service-learning with YPAR to their list for several reasons. One, while the form service takes and the ideologies that underlie it vary greatly in service-learning practice, action in YPAR is inherently critical and focused on higher order change, even as it may also work to ameliorate conditions. The students in this project completed concrete actions (e.g., raising funds, tutoring) that sought to resolve immediate problems in their communities, but they also critically examined and took high order actions aimed at creating long-term systemic change (e.g., researching ways to improve Latino community interaction for the Health Project, campaigning to change the rules and implement an intergeneration ESOL mentoring program, creating and disseminating videos and posters on police brutality to community stakeholders). Such actions may not be listened to or acted on by those in power, but the attempt made still represented a “service” act. These actions required “justice-oriented” citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) who could critically examine an issue on the personal, interpersonal, and societal levels and seek solutions to the problems on each level, whether they were ultimately successful or not. And because these kinds of actions are central to YPAR, guiding service-learning work with that practice can help participants focus on higher-order kinds of service, even as they also complete concrete personal and participatory actions (which I contend are also valuable).

More importantly, actions taken at any level as a result of a YPAR project will not be one-way transactions or aimed at reproducing an inequitable status quo. Because YPAR encourages students to develop critical consciousness and uses critical theories of

youth, race, and education to examine the problems they study, actions taken as a result of YPAR will always be undergirded by an awareness of social structures and power dynamics. Such an awareness represents a critical reflexivity that may not be specifically attended to by service-learning. For example, students collecting food as part of a YPAR project would be doing so with the encouragement to problematize that action even as they take it. In other words, as part of the on-going reflection and consciousness-raising in YPAR, students may avoid the counter-social justice results of charity or uncritical volunteerism even as they work to resolve tangible conditions. In our project, for example, the student groups tutoring and collecting money were constantly reflecting about why they were effective tutors/money collectors, why they felt qualified to “serve” in that capacity, and how the programs that they worked within could change their protocols to be more empowering for the community being served.

Deficit ideologies in service-learning. A second category of critique focuses on how service-learning practice often operates from deficit ideologies. Related to the individualist, charity, or volunteerism bend present in some service-learning work, which may obscure the larger social milieu surrounding an issue in favor of personal blame/responsibility, deficit ideologies in the practice may interfere with creating service-learning experiences that are truly social justice-oriented (Hyttén, 2001; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Deficit ideology manifests in multiple ways within service-learning, as I discussed in previous chapters. Two of these manifestations may be readily addressed by guiding the practice with YPAR.

First, the construction of reciprocity used in some approaches to service-learning is indicative of a deficit ideology. In more critical, authentically social justice-oriented service-learning like that promoted by Sheffield (2011) and Marullo and Edwards (2000), reciprocity focuses on the communities being served, understanding the student “servers” as inherently “getting something” from the process, and the central concern is over not “using” the served community or reinforcing a hierarchy of power with server over served. As a contrast, when reciprocity is mentioned in other service-learning literature, such as our district’s handbook, the concerns are reversed, implying a deficit ideology with regards to the served community. This orientation assumes that the community is benefiting from the students’ work and the focus is on making sure that student servers are also “getting something” of value from the community being served. In other words, reciprocity is focused on preventing the students from being “used” by this needy community.

Moreover, service-learning framed by a deficit ideology, because it frames the problems being addressed as the fault of those being served, may produce or reinforce, particularly in socially privileged students, negative perceptions of the communities and individuals they serve and feelings of their own moral superiority (Stenhouse & Jarrett, 2012). Thus, rather than calling students to social justice work, such service-learning practice may in fact reproduce social injustice even as it may result temporarily or locally in improved conditions for those served.

As described in chapter one, the theoretical foundation of YPAR speaks directly back to deficit ideologies regarding youth, race, and education. Whereas traditional

service-learning practice may retain a bend towards “fixing” certain people while assuming the inherent ability of others to do that “fixing,” YPAR centers the perspectives of those on the margins. Insider knowledge is especially valued. Because of YPAR’s explicitly asset-based approach (as opposed to one based on deficit ideology), the participants (usually marginalized themselves) may feel personally and/or academically empowered (Romero et al., 2008; Van Sluys, 2010) and may also begin to see themselves as social change agents (Irizzary, 2011; Romero et al., 2008). Our outcomes support these prior findings.

YPAR, with its centering of marginalized voices and emphasis on examining systems and structures, challenges deficit ideology on two fronts. For one, it repositions those often seen as “at-risk” or “needy” as those with valuable knowledge, power, and agency. For two, it challenges the notion that individual deficiency is the root cause for academic, economic, or social “failure” and instead focuses on the institutions and social power dynamics that produce and support (and often define what constitutes) “failure.” As such, it can help push service-learning towards an asset orientation and encourage it to adopt a critical theoretical lens.

The YPAR process was central to our efforts to push back against the individualist and deficit ideology that most of the students expressed at first. Through deep investigations framed by critical theories that centered their knowledge and lived experiences, the students were able to begin examining systemic causes and solutions for social problems and begin moving away from victim-blaming narratives, at least within

the confines of their service-learning project. As such, YPAR did prove effective for us in challenging deficit ideologies within the service-learning constructions at hand.

Marginalized populations in service-learning. Also intertwined with notions of deficit ideology, the third critique of service-learning's potential as a social justice pedagogy questions the ways marginalized populations are able to participate in the practice. In many service-learning manuals and research studies, it is assumed that the students engaging in service-learning do so with some social privilege, or as Butin (2006) describes them, "White, sheltered, middle-class, single, without children, un-indebted, and between ages 18 and 24" (p. 481). Mitchell, Donahue, and Young-Law (2012) report, "Service-learning is being implemented mostly by white faculty with mostly white students at predominantly white institutions to serve mostly poor individuals and mostly people of color" (p. 612). Butin (2006) warns, "There is a distinct possibility that service-learning may ultimately come to be viewed as the 'Whitest of the White' enclave... a luxury available only to the privileged few" (p. 482). As such, Mitchell et al. (2012) warn that service-learning is often implemented as a "pedagogy of whiteness" (p. 612):

Service learning projects based on a pedagogy of whiteness have minimal impact on the community and result in mis-educative experiences for students, such as unchallenged racism for White students and isolating experiences for students of color, and missed opportunities for educators to make their own instruction more transformative. (p. 613)

But as service-learning gains popularity as a general K-12 pedagogy and as an intervention strategy (e.g., in H.R. 2268, 2013), Butin's concern may be alleviated, while Mitchell et al.'s reinforced. Researchers and practitioners must attend to the experiences

of marginalized students in the program ranks because they will increasingly be included among them.

My assertion that more attention should be paid to the experiences of students of color is not to imply that no research has been done on marginalized students in service-learning. In the current climate of “research-based best practices,” the push towards service-learning as an intervention results from a small body of research indicating the practice’s effectiveness at meeting certain goals for remediating “at-risk” youth. However, as Mitchell et al. (2012) remind, in “the language of service learning, ‘underprivileged’ and ‘at risk’ for example, can reinforce stereotypes based in white supremacy” (p. 614). Thus, simple inclusion of marginalized youth in service-learning is not addressing the pedagogy of Whiteness, rather it may be reinforcing White supremacy and deficit ideology.

Moreover, many of the researchers proving service-learning’s effectiveness with “at-risk” youth operate from a deficit perspective regarding those youth. Many of the articles on “at-risk” youth and service-learning assume its effectiveness in terms of diminishing risky behaviors such as becoming pregnant and dropping out of school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008). Others talk about increasing student academic achievement by increasing efficacy (McIntosh & Munoz, 2009) and student engagement with school adults, class content (Arrington, 2010), peers, and support systems in the community, noting that “at-risk” or minority youth tend to be lacking in these kinds of engagements (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2005). These perspectives may be deficit-based because they remain focused on “fixing” these youth (and their individual choices) while

ignoring the larger social contexts, even as they conceive of the youth as the servers, as opposed to those served.

YPAR, because it is traditionally practiced with youth of color (Cammarota & Fine, 2008), creates an opportunity to engage youth of color and other marginalized youth in a service-learning practice that pays specific attention to their experience as “servers” who are not socially privileged. As Scales and Roehlkepartain (2005) and Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Wulsin (2008) report, many youth of color simply have no access to service-learning and when they do it may reflect a White normativity or be deficit-based (Mitchell et al., 2012). YPAR, on the other hand, is fundamentally about developing critical agency in those on the margins through an asset-based approach that centers youth voice. It can offer students of color a space from which to critique the deficit ideology and White normativity that underpin terms like “at-risk” and “achievement gap” (Tuck et al., 2008) through its explicit critique of the role race and racism play in the schooling of students of color. As Irizzary (2011) states:

Dominant narratives...surrounding the achievement gap give only surface attention to race, naming students of color as the problem...without critically examining the sociohistoric and sociocultural contexts...Focusing on race without paying sufficient attention to the ways racism is manifested...does little to close gaps in achievement...(p. 7)

Thus, in addition to encouraging critical, social justice-oriented students with senses of agency who can pay attention to both personal and higher order change, which our data supports, YPAR-guided service-learning itself may represent a socially-just shift in the

education of youth of color and other marginalized youth because it challenges the deficit ideology and White normativity rampant in many attempts at their schooling.

Importantly, we found that blending service-learning with YPAR did not require us to compromise the central tenets of either practice, but rather that each strengthened the other. YPAR gave us a practical framework and critical theoretical lens to guide our service-learning practice while service-learning's institutional acceptance and our district program's focus on concrete action and inclusion of research in the service-learning process facilitated our use of YPAR within the school system and strengthened our research and service action phases. These findings, particularly the positive impact that a YPAR framework can have on service-learning, should help future educators and researchers as they design more socially-just, critical projects and engage with diverse student populations.

Limitations and Future Research

While our project did demonstrate that students experienced critical agency during the YPAR-guided service-learning project and that such a project could be successfully embedded into a core classroom context and create spaces for countering deficit ideologies and promoting academic and civic engagement in marginalized youth, our findings are limited in several key ways. In this section, I discuss these limitations and offer suggestions for future research into critical agency, YPAR-guided service-learning, and critically-oriented work within institutional/core classroom contexts.

The primary limitation of this study, as with many ethnographies, is the specificity of our project's location and participant group. It may be that we were

successful blending YPAR and service-learning and embedding them within our course curriculum because that curriculum was particularly well-suited for such work. Other content area teachers may face other difficulties not discussed in this study or may find that solutions other than the ones I propose are more useful in their own context. Also, I worked with a group of Latin@ students in a rural school in an otherwise urban/suburban district in the southern United States. Researchers and teachers working with other student populations in other environments may find very different ideologies, points of resistance, and other contextually-specific challenges and opportunities than the ones that we navigated and I discuss here. But as I firmly believe a) that YPAR, critical service-learning, and YPAR-guided service-learning hold great potential for engaging marginalized youth as critical change agents and successful students, b) that all, but especially marginalized, students should have access to quality YPAR, critical service-learning, and YPAR-guided service-learning programs, and c) that such programs can be conducted within core coursework despite institutional mandates and regulations, I hope that other teachers and scholars will continue designing, implementing, and researching such programs in other content areas and with other groups of students so as to enrich our collective discourse and understanding of these methods and their impact on critical agency and academic engagement.

A second limitation of this study is that because our data collection period did not extend past the duration of the course I cannot make claims regarding the projects' ongoing impact on students' critical agency, school engagement, and civic involvement. Also related to timelines, the overall timeline for our YPAR-guide service-learning

project was relatively short, only one semester, and as such the impact of this project on students' critical agency and academic and civic empowerment may have been affected. For example, with additional time, students in the ESOL group could have seen the results of their letter petitioning teachers and administrators to change the rules and facilitate the intergenerational mentoring program. The police brutality group could have seen the comments on their video and perhaps found willing community members to safely dialog with regarding their findings. We could have explored LatCrit, CRT, and other theoretical orientations more explicitly during our issue investigations. Had time allowed for these and other activities or events, the students may have experienced critical agency and academic and civic engagement differently or more deeply.

Future projects may consider finding ways to extend their timelines, either by working within year-long, as opposed to block, scheduled courses, by creating multi-year projects, or by engaging with students outside of the course either before or after its official run. Additionally, while there are some longitudinal studies on academic and civic engagement as a result of YPAR or service-learning, none exist for blended practices like this one. Moreover, I could locate no longitudinal studies on critical agency or similar concepts within the service-learning or YPAR fields. Data on how these kinds of projects affect students long-term and beyond the confines of the work itself would be valuable to educators designing such programs.

Finally, while this project implicitly addressed the experiences of marginalized youth as service-learning participants, my analysis did not focus on nor collect data explicitly related to how they experienced reciprocity or power hierarchies between

server-served or their perceptions of Self and Other. As most discussions of service-learning still reflect the prevailing assumption that service-learners are socially privileged, more research is needed on how students positioned as non-dominant experience reciprocity, power, and identity during service-learning as their experiences and outcomes are likely to be different from those of their socially privileged peers.

Conclusion

My desire to promote social justice in and through education inspired and guided this research project. We blended YPAR with service-learning to bring a deeper, more intentionally critical, social justice orientation to that practice, and we fully integrated that project and its ideals into the course as a whole. In doing so, we attended to social justice in multiple ways. On one level, the students engaged in social justice work with their communities (even if they did not always understand it through that lens) through their YPAR-guided service-learning projects. But more than engaging in a social justice-oriented service practice, the teacher and I intended for the class itself—the pedagogy, the content, and the “management” strategies—to represent a more socially-just educational space for these students who too often find themselves negatively labeled and limited elsewhere in their schooling. We found that the most otherwise academically disengaged students were often the ones who most enthusiastically participated in the YPAR-guided service-learning work. As evidenced throughout the previous chapters, the ideas that their work was meaningful and connected to their lived experience and that we were trusting their thoughts and abilities as valid and valuable inspired them to produce research and take actions that not only demonstrated academic prowess but also helped

them speak back to the marginalization they suffered elsewhere in their school. Re-conceptualizing programs for such students using a YPAR-guided service-learning approach may be one way to engage marginalized youth in social justice-oriented service-learning *and* attend to broader social justice goals in education.

Moreover, YPAR has implications as an educational research methodology. Van Sluys (2010) advocates for YPAR in schools because it helps to

foreground counter-narratives that reveal the complexities and offer alternatives for working with diverse peoples...[and] complicates simplistic explanations of school success or failure by increasing the visibility of the variable contextual conditions of schooling. (p. 150)

Like Irizzary (2011), who engaged Latino students in YPAR precisely because he believed them to be uniquely qualified to conduct research on the education of Latino students and make recommendations for improving the practice, the students in our project came to clearly understand how their otherwise marginalized social positioning (e.g., Spanish-speakers, immigrants/non-US citizens, youth) were actually assets to their work and that their voices contributed important perspectives to the topics they investigated and acted to change. And importantly, in the case of the HIV and ESOL groups, gatekeepers in the organizations with which the students worked took the students' findings and recommendations seriously, even though substantive changes based upon those recommendations did not occur during the project's duration. As Romero et al. (2008) indicate when they refer to students' YPAR work as "filling a social and intellectual void" (p. 132), YPAR offers educational research a valuable tool for

centering the insider knowledge of those most deeply affected by the issues under investigation.

But more than contributing valuable perspectives to the stories that educational research seeks to tell, YPAR work also has the potential to attend to the oppressiveness or at least hierarchical nature of other research methodologies. Because it not only engages marginalized students as “participants” or “subjects” but as co-researchers, YPAR (and other participatory paradigms) tries to fundamentally shift power within the research construction into the hands of those most affected by the results of the given study. Throughout my work on this project, as I outlined in my methods chapter, I have taken seriously the idea of a research collective and tried to honor the students’ role as co-researcher as much as possible given that this work ultimately became my dissertation. In this vein, Tuck et al. (2008) describe YPAR as a

politic—an embedded and out-loud critique of colonization, racism, misogyny, homophobia and heterosexism, classism, and xenophobia in our society, in our research sites, amongst our research collective, and within the larger and historical research community. (p. 51)

Because it represents such a shift within the power dynamics of research, YPAR-guided projects may bring a greater sense of social justice to educational research as a whole, both in process and product.

Through our YPAR-guided service-learning project, we heeded the social justice call on four fronts—in our pedagogy, our social actions, our research methodology, and our research products. We are proud of ourselves and each other for this work and for taking on the risks and challenges of creating this space and project. Our work

demonstrates that critical pedagogy and asset ideology can operate within the public school system, and that YPAR-guided service-learning is one effective vehicle for introducing such classroom practices. It reinforced other researchers' findings that such practices promote academic and civic engagement among marginalized youth, and it uniquely demonstrated the possibility of such a project to foster students' critical agency—their ability to take considered, change-seeking personal, interpersonal, and systemic actions in the world. Those of us committed to social justice in and through education and educational research must continue to design, implement, and study the outcomes of projects like this one, both for the sake of the students involved and for the potential impact that fostering critical agency in youth could have on schooling and society.

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