BUT IS IT SERVICE-LEARNING?

by

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ABSTRACT

LUCY ARNOLD STEELE. But is it service-learning? (Under the direction of DR. HEATHER COFFEY)

Two-year schools serve a high population of traditionally marginalized students, including students of color, first-generation college students, older students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Ma & Baum, 2016). Historically, two-year schools have been organized around vocational programs and blue-collar work, leading to a differentiation in curriculum and the way education is carried out (Rose, 2014; Shor, 1980). Service-learning, a type of pedagogy that involves students participating in community projects as a part of their coursework, has become increasingly popular in two-year schools since the 1990s (Weglarz & Seybert, 2004), and two-year schools are often interested in the vocational possibilities and the prospect of increasing student engagement (Vaknin & Bresciani, 2013). This ethnographic study of a learning community at South Community College was conducted over the course of ten weeks in the fall of 2018. The learning community students completed a service-learning project as a required component of their coursework for the two learning community courses. With the absence of a cycle of reflection or a social justice framework for the class, the pedagogy observed was not really critical service-learning or service-learning at all. Though some of the student participants felt positive about the outcomes of the class project, opportunities for liberatory pedagogical practices and movement toward more equity in gateway courses may have been lost. This research suggests that more faculty

development and learning on critical service-learning is crucial to the successful

implementation of such projects.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Dr. Marsha Johnson, Dr. Darrell Johnson, and Dr. Lil Brannon. They showed me not only how to do it but why it matters.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Considering that income inequality is at the highest it has been in the United States and that the earning gap between White and Asian people outpaces Black and Latinx people at every level of income (Kochhar & Cilluffo, 2018), the importance of public education for people marginalized on the basis of race and class is critical. Higher education is often a gatekeeping institution for people with limited academic, social, and financial resources, so teaching practices designed with an eye toward social justice matter. One such teaching practice is critical service learning.

According to Carolyn O'Grady (2000), the phrase *service-learning* was initially used in 1969 by the Southern Regional Education Board. This organization defined service-learning as "the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth" (O'Grady, 1999, p. 6). Jeff Claus and Curtis Ogden (1999b) describe service-learning as "the idea of engaging youth in educationally framed community service activity" (p. 1). Anderson (1998) lays out a series of policy proposals to encourage service-learning in K-12 schools and higher education; this position paper also describes the reasons for engaging in service-learning in schools, including civic engagement and character development, a sense of belonging for students, community building, and social justice (pp. 3-6). Service-learning is a teaching strategy used in educational settings from elementary school through post-secondary education; though there are a variety of purposes for service-learning, all incarnations of the practice involve students participating in community service and reflection on that service as a part of their coursework. These community service activities can take place on the campus where the course is being taught, at other

educational institutions, or at a variety of other community locations, including churches, shelters, clinics, and community centers. Critiques of service-learning, however, include O'Grady's observation that "most of the current leading theorists in the field of service learning are White and…too little of the service learning literature specifically interrogates issues of power, racism, oppression, or social injustice" (2000, p. 14).

Critical service-learning, meanwhile, is grounded in activities that promote social change and activism; reflection and self-awareness are key components of critical service-learning (Mitchell, 2008). Mitchell (2008) defines critical service-learning as a transformative pedagogy that moves participants "to see themselves as agents of social change, and use the experience of service to address and respond to injustice in communities (p. 51). In attempting to develop some practical understanding of critical service-learning as a discrete activity, Butin (2015) suggests some ways of assessing whether critical service-learning has taken place, particularly critiquing too much alignment between service-learning activities the typical activities of a course, like grading, time progression in semesters, and centering of teachers over community partners.

Service-learning is becoming more popular on many two-year college campuses. After all, community colleges attract a wide swath of students, from displaced workers hoping to gain a new certification or skill set to students hoping to complete general education requirements and transfer to a four-year school. There are first-generation college students, single parents, and large number of students who work full-time while attending classes. Some community college students have advanced graduate degrees from other countries, and others are dually enrolled in high school coursework. To frame

this discussion in numbers, according to the College Board, 7.2 million undergraduate students were enrolled as either full- or part-time students at two-year institutions in 2014 (Ma & Baum, 2016, p. 2). These 7.2 million students made up around a quarter of U.S. undergraduates in 2014; students at public four-year colleges, private four-year colleges, and for-profit colleges make up the other 75% (Ma & Baum, 2016, p. 3). Furthermore, as the College Board documents, two-year schools serve a significant proportion of students of color, low socioeconomic status students, and first-generation college students. The College Board calculates that Black students comprise 11% and Hispanic students comprise 13% of the total undergraduate population at public four-year colleges, while Black students comprise 14% and Hispanic students comprise 22% of students at two-year colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016, p. 7). Two-year college students tend to be older as well; College Board found that 44% of students in two-year colleges were 25 or older, compared to 20% of freshmen and sophomore undergraduates at public four-year colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016, p. 8). Because of this diversity, some of the primary problems faced by community colleges include student support and completion through programs. Statistics are not particularly helpful in analyzing this problem because many students who do not "complete" two-year degrees actually do successfully transfer to four-year schools, leaving many community colleges with an incomplete picture of student progress and achievement. Despite the difficulty of tracking student completion and "success" at two-year schools, community colleges do grapple with providing support for traditionally marginalized students, particularly since such students often attend community college at greater rates than they do four-year schools. Marginalized students include students who have traditionally faced challenges in obtaining higher

education; these students include students of color and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

The question of students at the margins of higher education matters to researchers studying the impact of practices like service-learning. I broached the question with a class of composition students at a two-year college; what, I wondered out loud, does it mean to be marginalized in higher education? Their answers came right away: people without money are marginalized in higher education, they pointed out, because they are always being asked to buy things, from classes to books to gas. They continued that people are marginalized on the basis of race, on the basis of language, and on the basis of academic background. Their answers and perspectives on marginalization in higher education are important, and exploring these sorts of stories matters.

Since two-year colleges serve such a high proportion of students who have traditionally been marginalized in higher education, including students of color, low socioeconomic status students, older students, and first-generation college students, the role of community colleges in creating equitable access to higher education becomes clear. The majority of community colleges are open enrollment, which means that students do not need to complete an application and selection process that may exclude them from attendance. U.S. critical pedagogue Ira Shor (1980) examines the history of two-year schools and how their genesis converged with the growing rights and educational needs of people of color and women in *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*. Shor (1980) argues that two-year schools offer education that is different than the liberal arts education expected by four-year college students: "The school curriculum is structured so that they have to make exclusive choices between earning a living and

learning how to think, between a narrow skill and a spacious encounter with reality" (pp. 23-24). That vocational focus of community colleges, a focus that continues today, values job-appropriate skills and certifications over critical ways of thinking and being. Rose (2014) articulates the way these differences between blue collar and white collar work (differences that align with programs at two-year versus four-year schools) have wedged their way into our ways of talking and thinking about globalization and technology in this "new" modern economy. He points out the dichotomy between new work and old work codified in schools, but then carefully dismantles the commonsense logic of this distinction (Rose, 2014, pp. 85-86). Rose (2014) points out that old work, or blue-collar labor, is not only working with one's hands; there is intellectual labor involved with this kind of work as well (p. 88). Service and trade workers engage in complex, intellectual work that is not necessarily distinct from the kinds of thinking valued in white-collar work, and, as Rose (2014) points out, this distinction can negatively impact the education students at two-year schools receive: "Instead of this intellectual richness, we have developed a language that falsely defines entire economic eras and entire categories of workers by body and hand alone" (p. 91). For both Shor (1980) and Rose (2014), the way we talk and think about education at two-year schools is important because it informs and often limits the kind of education two-year students receive.

Shor (1980) and Rose (2014) see opportunity in critical education for two-year college students. Rose (2014) writes: "I am interested in places or occasions where poor people become more fully present, actors on the societal stage, their thoughts and feelings playing out in ways that can have a positive effect on the direction of their lives" (p. 189). He names community colleges as one of the sites of possibility for such agency. Critical

service-learning is a pedagogical approach that has been used to develop critical consciousness and agency in students at four-year institutions and in K-12 education for some time. In my work, I have become interested in the possibilities of service-learning as a catalyst for agency and critical consciousness for students at two-year schools.

At South Community College, a two-year school serving two rural counties located near an urban area, staff and faculty have begun experimenting with learning communities as a way to engage and retain students. Learning communities, though often associated with residency at four-year schools, provide students a way to connect deeply with the themes and concepts they are learning (Fink & Inkelas, 2015) and create connections between small groups of students. Historically, learning communities have been used as strategy to improve the academic experiences of traditionally marginalized students as the issues of access and retention have come to public attention with regard to higher education (Fink & Inkelas, 2015). South Community College's learning communities consist of a pair of linked courses; learning community students are required to enroll in both courses, which are planned and sometimes taught collaboratively. Each learning community completes a service-learning project in the course of the semester. At South Community College, learning communities are a part of a retention and success rate plan. The idea is that the connections formed in these classes will encourage students to complete the courses, enroll in more courses in the future, and complete their programs of study.

This study examined the stories and experiences of students enrolled in learning community courses at South Community College during the Fall 2018 semester. The two paired courses included College Orientation 101 and English 101, both required

"gateway" courses for students in Associate of Arts and Sciences programs at the college. I observed class interactions over an eight week period of time, focusing on parts of the course oriented toward the service-learning project in which the class engaged. I also collected reflections about service-learning written by students and completed semi-structured interviews with students in the learning community. Learning communities are a strategy used by the college to encourage retention, and student responses to the gateway courses and the service-learning projects provide a window into these students' initial experiences in higher education.

In this study, I particularly attended to the stories of students marginalized on the basis of race and ethnicity, although neither of these demographic measures can be disentangled from socioeconomic status. This research focused on the stories and identities of traditionally marginalized community college students participating in service learning projects as a part of their learning community curriculum.

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What stories do marginalized community college students tell about themselves?

2. What stories do marginalized community college students tell about the service-learning projects they are conducting?

3. What moments of transformation, or movement from object to subject, happen in the course of these stories?

The stories these students tell about themselves and service-learning reveals much about how they think about service-learning, including whether they see the projects as beneficial to their education and how they connect to their peers and communities as a

result of these activities. Their stories also reveal their own perspectives on marginalization and whether they construe themselves as insiders at the college or whether they exist somewhere along the margins, which may be related to their identities in terms of race, gender, class, background, or other factors. In terms of transformation, the shifts I examine are not systemic changes or even large-scale differences; rather, these transformations might occur in small moments, reflecting a modicum of agency.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE

LITERATURE

2.1 Literature Review

This study focuses on service-learning projects completed by students at a two-year college in an English 101 course. In this chapter, I will review the literature on critical service-learning generally, as well as critical service-learning in the context of two-year colleges and in the context of writing instruction.

Furco (1999) outlines a way for institutions to implement and assess service-learning through a rubric focusing on five key areas: philosophy and mission for service-learning, faculty engagement in service-learning, student engagement in service-learning, community engagement in service-learning, and institutional support for service-learning (p. 3). Some of the discussion of service-learning relates to whether such work should be a force for social change, as Claus and Ogden (1999a) suggest, or whether the goals of charity and character development are in themselves sufficient.

2.1.1 The Pedagogy of Critical Service-Learning

Butin (2010), an academic and public advocate for critical service-learning, in attempting to clarify the confusion around the varied aims of service-learning at different institutions, created a taxonomy of service-learning including technical, cultural, political, and antifoundational perspectives. The technical perspective views service-learning as an educational best practice that engages students and connects them to course content (Butin, 2010, p. 8). The cultural perspective organizes service-learning as a way to improve democracy and allow people to connect with various and diverse perspectives (Butin, 2010, pp. 9-10). The political perspective is concerned with power

imbalances and access to power and legitimacy (Butin, 2010, p. 11). The antifoundational

perspective encourages the breaking down of binaries and certainties, approaching

knowledge from, as Butin (2010) puts it, "a position of doubt rather than certainty" (pp.

13-14). Critical service-learning as defined by Mitchell (2008) is situated somewhere on

a spectrum between the cultural, political, and antifoundational perspectives of service-

learning, and it is useful to examine how these perspectives are entwined and how they

are not (see Figure 1). It is also useful to note that critical service-learning, though a

subset of service-learning, may also contain many variations and subcategories itself.

Technical

Cultural

Gray clouds
represent
critical
service-
learning
purposes

Political

Antifoundational
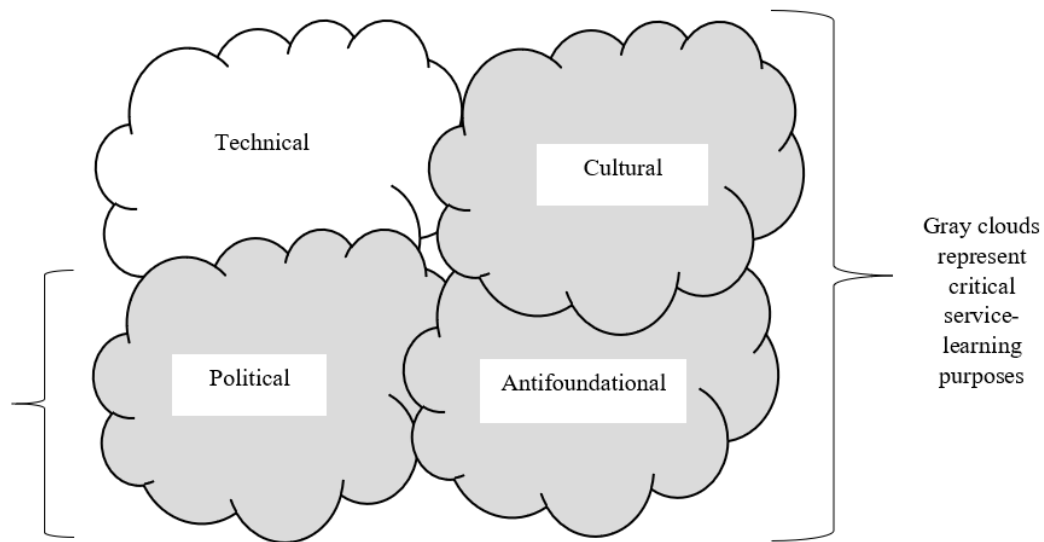
Figure 1. Purposes for service-learning

2.1.2 Focus on Social Injustice

In noting the similarities between traditional service-learning and critical service-

learning, Mitchell (2008) argues that cycles of reflection and connections between

classroom learning and work in the community are components of both types of service-

learning. Mitchell sees significant differences in the core of the work, though with

traditional service-learning focusing on "serving to learn" and "learning to serve" (2008, p. 53); she contends that traditional service-learning focuses more on outcomes for the student (2008, p. 52). Critical service-learning, meanwhile, focuses on social change, working to redistribute power, and the development of authentic relationships (Mitchell, 2008, p. 53); see figure 2 for Mitchell's visual representation of the difference between service-learning and critical service-learning. These elements are key to differentiating critical service-learning because traditional service-learning can often resemble critical service-learning. For example, examining diversity or "fixing" problems in communities are often elements of traditional service learning (Mitchell, 2008, p. 57). Conversely, critical service-learning programs are interested in the power dynamics and social structures that underlie such problems and inequalities. For critical service-learning programs, "serving" the community is not sufficient; critical service-learning participants work alongside communities to be catalysts for social change.

Traditional Service-Learning

Community Component

reflection

Learning to Serve ⟷ Serving to Learn

reflection

Classroom Component

Critical Service-Learning

Community Component   *reflection*

A Social Change Orientation ➕ Working to Redistribute Power ➕ Developing Authentic Relationships

reflection   Classroom Component
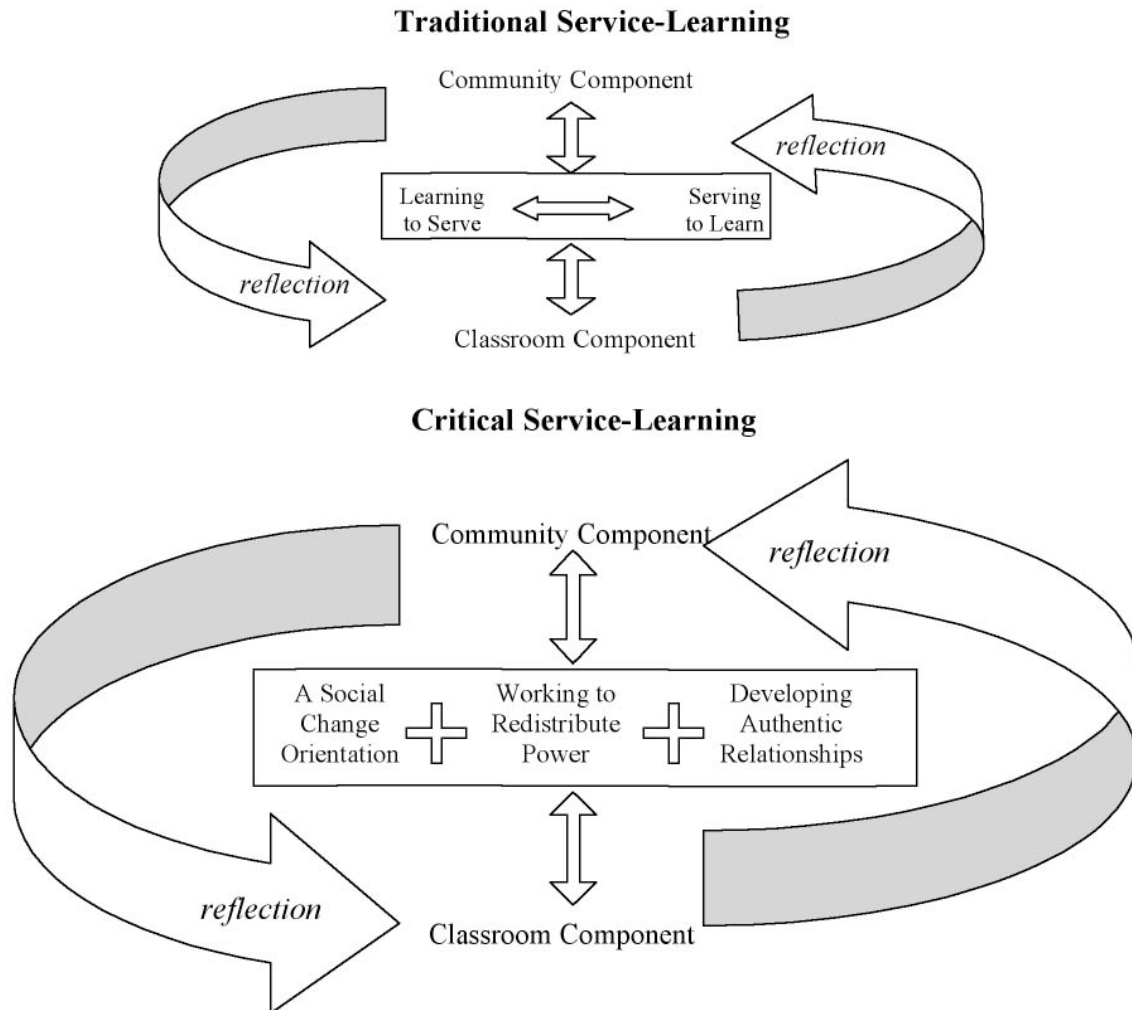
Figure 2. Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning (Mitchell, 2008, p. 53)

This differentiation between these two mindsets can be particularly challenging in U.S. schools. Mike Rose (2014) describes the way many people in the U.S. apply an understanding of individual motivation and goal-setting to larger social inequities. Rose (2014) suggests the "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" model as one that ascribes success to individual (or family) determination (p. 10). Many traditional service-learning programs stem from a similar philosophy of "helping" people who may have had a bad situation or have made mistakes. Critical service-learning perspectives, however, incorporate the broader understanding of social structures that Rose (2014) describes, while trying to maintain some grasp on individual motivation: "it does not diminish the

importance of individual commitment and effort also to acknowledge the tremendous role played in achievement by the kind, distribution, and accessibility of institutions, programs, and other resources. And these resources, as everybody knows, are not equally available" (pp. 10-11). The focus on social injustice by critical service-learning proponents indicates this understanding of the way people are impacted by social structures, institutions, and history.

Who decides on the problem to be solved or the service project to be completed in service learning contexts? The answer to that question varies from context to context, but all too often those "served" by service-learning students are the objects of the service and the learning instead of the empowered decision makers with agency. These questions are further complicated by issues of race, class, and gender. Studies analyzing the participation of White preservice teachers in service-learning projects often focus on the learning that happens with the White teachers, whether the projects are viewed as successes or failures (Dooley & Burant, 2015; Jones, Gilbride-Brown, & Gasiorski, 2005; Ogden, 1999). There is limited work on service-learning projects completed by students of color, however. Coffey and Butler (2018) describe a critical service-learning activity completed at a four-year university and found significant impact on students of color and male students, which suggests that critical service-learning may be particularly important for marginalized students. Similarly, Reed and Butler (2015) suggest that critical service-learning can help marginalized students understand systemic inequities through a critical lens that they may then be able to apply to their own perspectives. Seider, Huguley, and Novick (2013), however, writing about the Social Action Program, a service-learning program initiated at a four-year institution, describe students of color as less engaged in

community building compared to their White peers with service-learning experiences. The researchers found that some of the reasons students of color felt less engaged in the activities had to do with their relationships with White students:

> …several of the students of color who participated in the current study also characterized their reluctance as due to concerns about appearing overly sensitive about issues of racism, as well as frustration with conveying their perspectives on race and racism to their White classmates. (Seider et al., 2013, p. 23)

Furthermore, even though the White students did experience more engagement with the project and more movement toward the social justice mindsets encouraged by the program, they still othered community members in their language choices:

> The language with which many White students in Social Action Program discussed the individuals they encountered at their service placements revealed the extent to which they—either consciously or unconsciously—perceived these individuals to be a different "type" of person from themselves and their peers. (Seider et al., 2013, p. 24)

Seider et al.'s (2013) study, a mixed methods analysis that combined statistical analysis of survey responses with a qualitative analysis of interviews with service-learning participants, suggests that students of color who participate in service-learning, at least alongside their White peers, may not benefit from the experiences in the same way that White students seem to because the students of color end up engaging in more emotional labor around issues of race and racism. As a researcher, I am interested in the experiences of students of color, how they construe service-learning experiences, and whether that additional labor continues to be a factor with the community college participants.

To prepare students for critical service-learning, the classroom needs to encourage students to develop awareness of their own assumptions about race, class, gender, and social institutions. Boyle-Baise (2002) suggests that students should be provided a "framework to question the 'rightness' of one's views" (p. 17). Such frameworks include analysis of how different groups might think about and value ideas differently. Boyle-Baise (2002) also points to the need for explicit discussion of justice, inclusion, antiracism, and other aims of service-learning geared toward social change (p. 25). In one example of a tacit strategy for encouraging community among her students and moving toward the aims of service-learning for social change, Boyle-Baise (2002) provides classroom opportunities for students to work in mixed-race groups with cooperative goals (p. 26).

Another important move for critical service-learning is the way community partners are construed in the classroom by students and teachers. Social change is only possible when these relationships are "equal, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial" (Boyle-Baise, 2002, p.17). The planning of critical service-learning must, then, include community partnerships at every stage of the endeavor, including planning and classroom experiences. Boyle-Baise (2002) shares the power of her role as a university professor conducting service-learning activities with community partners by inviting them to be co-constructors and evaluators of the curriculum and student performance (pp. 84-85).

2.1.3 Critical Service-Learning and Writing

Mitchell (2008) explains how critical service-learning programs embed a social justice mindset, not only in community-focused work, but also in the classroom:

Service, itself, is a concept steeped in issues of identity and privilege which must

be wrestled with for students to be effective in their service work. A critical

service-learning program is intentional in its social change orientation and in its

aim toward a more just and caring society; part of that intentionality is

demonstrated in the concepts with which students engage in classroom

discussions, readings, and writing assignments. (p. 55)

In critical service-learning-oriented classrooms, such writing assignments prepare

students to engage in service-learning by developing the habit of reflection and helping

students develop a theoretical framework for engaging in service.

Developing a classroom culture of inquiry is key to critical service-learning for

Wilhelm, Douglas, and Fry (2014). They discuss the ways in which writing assignments

develop that kind of a classroom culture: "prereading and prewriting activities that

motivate and engage the students, that activate what they already care about and know,

and then build upon this to prepare them…" (Wilhelm et al., 2014, p. 26). This indicates

the ways in which writing can engage students and value their prior knowledge.

Encouraging reflective cycles takes another step, though, as Wilhelm et al. (2014) also

note: "Frontloading… uncovers assumptions and misconceptions that students may have

about a topic that are important to articulate because this foregrounding makes these

misconceptions imminently more susceptible to correction and accommodation" (p. 27).

Writing assignments that prepare students for critical service-learning are also preparing

them for self-analysis and self-awareness.

Other researchers argue for writing assignments that move students from being

critical consumers to critical creators of media. Lewis and Causey (2015) describe a

series of class assignments that encourage students to critically interpret texts and then recontextualize those texts for their own purposes. The goals of these class activities are social justice and advocacy for issues that matter to the students (Lewis & Causey, 2015, p. 129). Johnson and Winn (2015) similarly argue for a literacy continuum that situates student writing and learning in a spectrum that includes social justice and advocacy (p. 57).

In critical media pedagogy, as it is described by Morrell, Duenas, Garcia, and Lopez (2013), writing assignments can go one step further in helping students develop their own critical frameworks for understanding the world. In the critical ethnographies portrayed by Morrell et al. (2013), one of the classrooms, Ms. Garcia's English class, encourages students to engage in critical writing throughout the year, which they frame in this way: "The classroom is a space for students to explore deep social issues, many of which influence students in their school and community. By re-framing assignments and connecting them to kids' everyday lives, students are given a voice and can express their thoughts" (pp. 52-53). Mr. Lopez, whose classroom is also portrayed in Morrell et al.'s (2013) critical ethnography, provides his students with a theoretical framework for understanding media, and students' writings are their analyses of these frameworks applied to media they consume (pp. 87-88). This seems like some of the most important work of writing assignments that prepare students for critical service-learning.

2.1.4 Critical Service-Learning and Agency

The premise of critical service-learning relates to agency in significant ways. Mitchell (2008) differentiates critical service-learning as service-learning projects with explicit social justice orientations. Critical service-learning, then, encourages students to

address issues of institutional inequality. Butin (2015) problematizes the actual impact of critical service-learning: "This distinction—that desires are just that, desires—offers one the space to step back and to better understand what one's dreams of justice have accomplished" (p. 7). For Butin (2015), considering the actual effects of service-learning is an important part of the process, and he makes a case for some specific metrics to determine whether service-learning is critical or not; such metrics include whether the service-learning coincides with the timeline of the course, whether a final paper is the primary source of assessment, and the degree of engagement between the teacher and the community partners (pp. 8-9). These are practical metrics that Butin (2015) phrases as questions, but his prior point about the *desire* for social justice is also worth considering from a critical perspective. Butin (2015) seems to suggest that even a desire for social justice is a product of the capitalist institutions within which critical service-learning pedagogies operate. His response to those desires, these dreams, is to interrupt them, to "suggest that educators may need to wake up to the pedestrian realities around them and embrace such real world dreams to begin to truly dream again" (p. 9).

Butin (2015) asks some of the hard questions about the state of critical service-learning. While acknowledging how empowering critical service-learning has been for researchers and teachers in higher education, Butin (2015) suggests that critical service-learning may not be accomplishing its actual aims of reciprocity and collaboration between institutions and community partners and the movement toward social transformation. His questions are important to parse because the research on critical service-learning is snared in its own enculturation into higher education. Researchers who study critical service-learning are universally members of academia and do not represent

community partners; there are not benefits to publication for most such community partners, so the benefits of research and publication fall primarily to higher education faculty and graduate students. Cynthia Lewis, Patricia Enciso, and Elizabeth Birr Moje (2007) describe this problem of research (though not specifically on the topic of critical service-learning); they examine the relationships between researchers and K-12 teachers and students and argue that the reorientation of the relationships between them is a crucial component of liberatory research: "This process of redesign is undertaken in collaboration with participants. It is not a process that can be done for or to participants. Rather than merely consuming knowledge, participants who collaborate with researchers engage in the production of knowledge" (p. 4). They argue, then, that though participants may not benefit from publication in the same ways that university researchers do, it is important to include them in the process of creating knowledge about K-12 classrooms. Though Butin (2015) suggests that critical service-learning may not be happening, I contend that we do not have enough information to know this, and furthermore, it is important to include community stakeholders in conversations about whether the aims of critical service-learning are being achieved.

This line of thought is important to my study because I am also contributing to the body of knowledge about critical service-learning. My participants are marginalized students, including students of color, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and non-traditional students, so it is important for me to consider ways of including their perspectives, even when their perspectives are at odds with mine. This is challenging, both ideologically and methodologically. Freire (1998) addresses some aspects of the ideological problem here:

One of the forms of struggle against the lack of respect for education on the part

of the constituted authorities is, on the one hand, our own refusal to transform our

teaching into a mere a sideline and, on the other hand, our rejection of a

domesticating, paternal attitude toward the students. (p. 65)

Research conducted and reported by university faculty and students can easily take on

that paternalistic attitude toward community partners and participants; community

partners can become the "objects" of critical service-learning, at least in the

documentation of the process, when their voices are not included. Freire (1998), in

describing critical learning, notes that "learners will be engaged in a continuous

transformation through which they become authentic subjects of the construction and

reconstruction of what is being taught, side by side with the teacher, who is equally

subject to the same process" (p. 33). If critical learning and teaching represents the

democratizing stance between teachers and students, it makes sense that critical research

on critical service-learning should have a similar democratizing force.

All of this is not to say that Butin (2015) does not have a point; he very well may,

and, ultimately, the portrayal of critical service-learning in literature of the field is

important, especially to how critical service-learning continues to be constructed and

carried out. Butin (2015) asks us to think about what critical service-learning actually is

and who is benefitting from it, and these are material questions worth asking.

The ways in way critical pedagogy is applied to critical service-learning projects

depends on both the institutional space available for service-learning and on the

participants themselves. For example, Stenhouse and Jarrett (2012) conducted a study on

preservice teachers participating in a critical pedagogy version of service-learning; in this

study 66% of participants were White. Stenhouse and Jarrett (2012) analyzed a service-learning project built on Shor's critical pedagogy principles, but in this study that use of critical pedagogy applied to the preservice teachers, who were mostly White and female. Additionally, Sprague Martinez et al (2017) describe a critical service project conducted with youth of color as a part of a community-based learning activity. This project used an inquiry-based curriculum based on Freire's critical pedagogy and trained young teachers of color to facilitate the project with the young people (Sprague Martinez et al., 2017, pp. 72-73). This 10-week program was offered at an afterschool program at a middle school in Boston, and the focus of the curriculum was health equity (Sprague Martinez et al., 2017, p. 72). Students in the program met with local healthcare workers and learned about the state of access to healthcare in their community; they then created educational materials for dissemination based on their research (Sprague Martinez et al., 2017, p. 77). In a survey conducted both pre and post activity, a borderline statistically significant number of participants (according to the researchers) changed their answer from agree to disagree with the statement: "It is possible for people to improve the world they live in" (Sprague Martinez et al., 2017, p. 80). A similar percentage of students shifted their answer from agree to disagree with the statement: "Doing something to help others is important to me" (Sprague Martinez et al., 2017, p. 80). Yet a percentage of students also changed their response from disagree to agree with this statement: "I have the skills I need to make changes in my community" (Sprague Martinez et al., 2017, p. 80). Despite mixed results on the surveys, Sprague Martinez et al. (2017) concluded that critical service-learning provided participants with ways to resist unhealthy behaviors that were a part of their communities (p. 85). These survey results suggest at some possibilities for

the impact of critical service-learning on students of color, but there is room for more research, especially qualitative research, to understand the narratives engaged in by these students, which is the goal of this study.

Reed and Butler (2015) describe critical service-learning conducted by students at an urban middle school, where Reed, the public school teacher, had previously doubted the possibilities of critical service-learning with her students because they were so often the recipients of service (p. 56). They argue that encouraging urban students to participate in critical service-learning disrupts some of the stereotypes that others believe and that some of them have internalized (Reed & Butler, 2015, p. 56). Reed and Butler (2015) argue that "There are ways to effectively address social inequities in this country without pointing the finger of blame and shame at students whose families have some financial hardships" (p. 61); they contend that critical service-learning allows students to develop awareness of the social conditions that have led to their oppression, instead of accepting a normed responsibility for that condition. Considering the general "pulling yourself up by your bootstraps" mentality that Rose (2014) describes as being prevalent in U.S. culture and schooling (p. 10), consideration of how to frame poverty and social needs without blaming marginalized people is particularly important. While service-learning can be undertaken without attention to the social conditions and history that have led to poverty and oppression, these issues are fore fronted by critical service-learning.

Verjee (2012) conducted critical service-learning with a variety of women of color who were students, faculty, and staff at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. In Verjee's (2012) study, the participants pointed out the need for institutional change in order for critical service-learning activities to be successful; that

is, they suggested that institutions that maintain largely White, paternalistic hegemonic structures are unlikely to be sites of successful critical service-learning (p. 66-67). In their study, Verjee (2012) uses a critical race framework to understand the counternarratives of fourteen women who were students, staff, faculty, and community members; Verjee (2012) defines counter-stories as those narratives that challenge the dominant, legitimized narratives of the White patriarchy (p. 58). Their participants noted that service-learning partnerships could only create change if the university held itself accountable for change on matters of social justice (Verjee, 2012, p. 67). As one of Verjee's (2012) participants notes: "Looking at oneself and seeing marginalization within academia, right? I mean, how can it understand outside, when you know, there's no movement at all for racialized people within academia" (p. 66).

It is important to consider how studies on service-learning construe race, particularly when the teachers, researchers, and service-learning students are all majority White. In Green's (2001) article on a service-learning project that involved her majority White students tutoring at a majority Black school, she writes about the challenges that White students often face when doing service-learning projects and facing the realities of racial inequity. Her conclusion about the success of the service-learning project and the way her students construed race is instructive: "The presence of students of color in the classroom made discussions of race harder for majority students to dismiss, and the ability of white and African American students to talk with one another across racial lines was, in my experience, exceptional" (Green, 2001, pp. 24-25). This analysis centers the experiences of the White students and does not mention the challenges faced by students of color who were the objects of that transformation of the White students. Green (2001)

goes on to talk about the importance of including students of color in the service-learning

project, but there is little admission of the costs borne by those students of color, costs

that are suggested in Seider et al.'s (2013) study that compared the experiences of White

students and students of color involved in service-learning projects.

2.1.5 Service-Learning and Community Colleges

Service-learning is a pedagogical activity that has found some traction in

community college either because of, or in spite of, the vocational tendencies described

by Shor and Rose. Service-learning has really only been advocated by the American

Association of Community Colleges since 1994 (Weglarz & Seybert, 2004). Service-

learning is any class activity that requires service to a community as a component of the

course; critical service-learning is the same but also includes a social justice mindset

(Claus & Ogden, 1999a). Some community colleges are experimenting with service-

learning pedagogies, often in the interest of student engagement and community-building

(Vaknin & Bresciani, 2013), issues that particularly challenge community colleges where

all students are commuters and not residential. There have been few studies directly on

critical service-learning in two-year institutions, though some studies have that mindset.

For the most part, there is little differentiation between service-learning and critical

service-learning in the literature about service-learning in two-year institutions.

In a survey conducted at one community college, Weglarz and Seybert (2004)

determined that students thought that service-learning activities increased their

"'awareness of community needs' (86%), 'appreciation of differences among people'

(82%), 'awareness of an individual's impact on the community' (78%), 'empathy for

others' (78%), and 'ability to relate to others' (74%)" (p. 128). These results indicate that

the possibilities of service-learning move beyond workforce development and also include the development of interpersonal skills and civic engagement.

In a cross-institutional study, Vaknin and Bresciani (2013) conducted focus groups, interviews, and observations in order to assess the service-learning programs at a two-year college by comparing the program to that of a four-year college. They suggest that there are a few crucial elements of successful service-learning programs including diverse community partners, connections between curriculum and service-learning activities, reflection, a process for feedback, and sustainability (Vaknin & Bresciana, 2013, pp. 982-988). Vaknin and Bresciani (2013) argue that

> Community colleges are a very suitable instrument to connect academics with community service for a variety of reasons. Their students are unique because they typically live in the community, grew up in the community, and/or plan to live in the community in the future. Because the students have ties to the area where their community college is located, service-learning programs not only provide variety in the presentation of course content, but also may increase civic responsibility. (p. 988)

This argument contends that the locality of community college students may strengthen the connection between service-learning participants and civic engagement at community colleges.

One criticism of service-learning initiatives in community college settings include questions about the appropriateness of the fit for non-traditional students, who are more likely to be employed and responsible for families while they complete their coursework (Largent, 2013, p. 297). Largent (2013) studied the impact of service-learning on such

non-traditional students, which they defined as students 22 and older. Largent (2013) determined that service-learning impacted students' interest in volunteering after graduation and indicated that students felt personal fulfilled by the service-learning activities. This study also indicated that reflection is an integral component of service-learning (Largent, 2013).

In much of the research on service-learning at two-year colleges, the institutional interest in enrollment and retention, which are significant concerns for community colleges, is apparent from the way the research is construed. Hayward (2014) describes a service-learning project at one community college that directly links service-learning to work with students volunteering their time by completing work related to their vocational programs for unemployed or underemployed community members. This program emphasized the job skills students accrued in the process in completing the service-learning projects. That relationship between learning and vocation is an important factor for community colleges.

Similarly, Sass and Coll (2015) describe the positive effects of service-learning on students in terms of their achievement of course goals. The aims of service-learning described in these two studies are not surprising considering the rhetoric of learning at two-year colleges and the way learning is often construed as course-specific, skill-specific, and vocation-specific. This study attempts to establish a relationship between successful student completion of coursework and service-learning activities.

These motivations for service-learning are quite different from the motivations for service-learning described by some four-year college service-learning perspectives, which are much more likely to relate to student mindsets than to student success or

course completion rates. For example, Hughes et al. (2012) describe the aims of service-learning at four-year institutions in this way:

> Exposure to and interactions with public school students—particularly attending high-poverty schools—is a valuable means toward college students' understanding of the profound and far-reaching effects of poverty and the social and economic inequities that shape today's social justice issues. However, it is likely that, without intentional efforts, the majority White middle-class college population will have little opportunity to encounter the more diverse public school population. (p. 769)

The aims of service-learning in this case include broadening the perspective of students who are statistically Whiter and higher socioeconomically status (Hughes et al., 2012, p. 768). That aspect of service-learning that encourages service-learning students to "encounter" people who are the "other" is one of the problematic aspects of service-learning. Service-learning projects framed in this way are about meeting the needs of the service-learning students, who, at least in this case, are privileged already.

Parkins (2014), in describing a service-learning project she conducted on remembering murdered women and confronting violence toward women, also addresses this issue: "The service learning impulse, which emphasized the needs of the students over the nuances of the lives they were in dialogue with, encouraged students to dwell in what they knew about violence against women, about women, and about community" (p. 138). Parkins (2014) grapples here with an inherent problem of service-learning pedagogy, which is that it centers the learner over the community being served. For

Parkins (2014), encouraging her students to disrupt the narratives they already held about women and violence was an important part of this decentering process.

Frost-Arnold (2015) describes this disruptive component of service-learning in her "Epistemologies of Ignorance," in which she describes ignorance of privilege (p. 31). She describes the dangers of such ignorance in the context of "colorblindness": "Collective memory is our social sense of history; it is encoded in textbooks, ceremonies, holidays, and monuments. Textbooks that downplay the role of slavery in the founding of America, skim over the Indian genocide, or neglect the internment of Japanese-Americans all promote White ignorance of the ongoing history of racism" (Frost-Arnold, 2015, p. 32). Frost-Arnold (2015) goes on to discuss the ethical dilemmas of revealing privilege and how marginalized communities negotiate power to privileged service-learning students. These, of course, are extremely important questions that educators working with privileged students must face.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

On his *Waypoint* podcast, philosopher and game critic Austin Walker (2018) reflects on the impact his critical work has on people and wonders about the potential for really creating social change. He argues that disengaging will definitely mean "losing" but wonders if change is possible through critical engagement with media. He goes on to observe that he is certainly impacting his listeners because he is giving out helmets to people "bashing their head against the brick wall. The helmet protects their head, but it doesn't bring the wall down" (Walker, 2018). Walker's (2018) work speaks to me as a critical pedagogue; I think that I am providing helmets for my students, especially students from traditionally marginalized communities. It is unclear, however, whether

this kind of work has the capacity to create social change. Walker (2018) finally concludes in his podcast that giving out helmets is good work to do, though it is frustrating that the "brick wall" remains intact. Walker's (2018) thinking resonates with me; if I am giving out helmets to my students as they bang their heads against White supremacy, the patriarchy, and plutocratic forces that inevitably influence their lives, I think that is still very good work. In this study, I delve into questions of agency and identity and try to understand the ways in which the critical work we do as teachers can provide opportunities for agency for our students and the ways in which they understand their own identities within their communities.

2.2.1 Agency

Can, then, humans do anything to change the social world? This is the question of agency. Following the tradition of Bakhtin (1983) and Vgotsky (1978), Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain (1998) consider the question and begin with the determination that "Human agency may be frail, especially among those with little power, but it happens daily and mundanely, and it deserves our attention" (p. 5). Holland et al. (1998) construe agency by considering identity, which they frame as both the personal space and the cultural lives that humans live; they understand identity as made up of social behaviors (p. 5). They consider both the ways in which identities are influenced by social and cultural worlds and the ways in which identities influence those worlds in turn (Holland et al., 1998, p. 5). They construe these social worlds, or figured worlds, as collective spaces in which humans believe; these spaces are socially constructed through shared beliefs (Holland et al., 1998, p. 49). Since identities are mediated by figured worlds, agency is possible when identities "improvise" new social actions, often because old

patterns of behavior are not available. To demonstrate the concept of improvisation, Holland et al. (1998) recount the story of a low-caste Nepalese woman being interviewed by two of the writers. The writers were working from the home of a high-caste women, and low-caste people would generally not be allowed in this place. Seeing that the low-caste woman had arrived at the house, the writers called down from the balcony where they were located and invited her up. Instead of coming through the house, the woman scaled the wall and came onto the balcony in that way to avoid going into the house of the high-caste woman. Holland et al. (1998) use this wall-climbing anecdote as an example of improvisation (p. 9).

According to Aronowitz's reading of critical pedagogy, Freire argues that the "educator's task is to encourage human agency" (Freire, 1998, p. 10). Indeed, Freire (1998) argues that teachers must respect the autonomy of their students, even though the values of people are different (pp. 69-70). Further, Freire (1998) rejects an acceptance of the system and argues for the possibility of agency as the very premise of education: "Educational practice itself, as an experience in humanization, must be impregnated with this ideal" (p. 103). For Freire, teaching is inextricable from believing in the possibility of agency for students and for humans.

Poststructuralists make a far less hopeful case for agency. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977) lays out his case for the social institutions that define normality for people. These normality-defining, mandatory social institutions include prisons, mental institutions, and schools. Foucault argues that it is through discipline and punishment that normality is defined and perpetuated. First, punishment compares the behaviors of people within the system, laying the groundwork for hierarchy. Behaviors

can be leveled or quantified, allowing individuals to be classified. Punishment defines the liminal space of "abnormality," marking what behaviors will be defined by this difference that matters, to recontextualize Derrida (1978). Summing up this hierarchy achieved by systems of punishment within institutions, Foucault (1977) writes: "The perpetual penalty that traverse all points and supervises every instant in the disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In short, it *normalizes*" (p. 183). This system of punishment and normalization is so pervasive because institutions like schools are spread out over a series of bureaucracies and institutional mechanisms. Teacher and student roles tend to be static within these systems.

As a cog, a student or teacher, in the machinery of education, it is daunting to consider the vastness and the authority of the institution of education. Still, there are plenty of cultural narratives that pit the "little guy" against the system. David brings down Goliath with his tiny slingshot. Foucault (1977) foregoes that kind of false hope as well by pointing on the degree to which we cogs all police ourselves and are not just components of the institution; we are the institution. Foucault's (1977) concept of the panopticon, remixed from Jeremy Bentham's analysis of effective prison systems metaphorically describes the manner in which we, believing we are under surveillance by the institution, learn to surveil ourselves and others, thus perpetrating the system. In *Discipline and Punish*, it is not a question of agency; we are only permitted to act in ways that perpetuate the system.

2.2.2 Critical Theory and Schooling

Some Marxist critics decry the usefulness of Foucault to progressive thinking, claiming that his ideological framework, with its emphasis on decentralized power structures that are perpetuated by the people who operate within those power structures, often unconsciously, does not provide a useful position for resistance. McLaren and Muñoz (2000), for instance, write:

This follows from a recession of Marxist critique in the former heartlands of educational theory—the sociology of education and curriculum studies—which have now been overtaken by the voguish apostasy of post-structuralist and postmodernist critiques with their emphasis on 'power/knowledge relations' and their disabling absention from social relations of production. (p. 28)

While McLaren and Muñoz (2000) bleakly decry the prevalence of Foucauldian or poststructuralist philosophies in education, understanding the ways institutions operate and how ideologies are reproduced is not a hopeless endeavor. Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) argue in a similar vein about the problems with Foucault's framework, which they term "reproduction theory":

Indeed, human subjects generally 'disappear' amidst a theory that leaves no room for moments of self-creation, mediation, and resistance. These accounts often leave us with a view of schooling and domination that appears to have been pressed out of an Orwellian fantasy; schools are often viewed as factories or prisons, teachers and students alike act merely as pawns and role bearers constrained by the logic and social practices of the capitalist system. (p. 71)

Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) make an argument for the "resistance theory" of schooling, a way of reading schools as sites of resistance where students and teachers do have agency.

2.2.3 Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy provides an important context for critical service learning in U.S. schools. Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* offers a critique of the banking model of education and articulates how that banking model maintains the oppression of people disenfranchised under the status quo. Freire (1998) also develops a philosophy of education that encourages the curiosity and inquiry of students and imagines teachers as co-learners in the process of education.

Basing his work on Freire's critical pedagogy, Shor (1980) examines the possibilities of critical pedagogy in U.S. community colleges. Particularly important in the consideration of critical service-learning, Shor (1980) contends that critical consciousness prepares working class people to fully participate in democracy and feel agency in their own lives (p. 48); he describes the ways in which the ruling class proscribe a way of thinking, a *false consciousness*, and encourage *reification* among the working class (p. 55). Critical consciousness and critical teaching are ways to mitigate these knowledge and power tools of the elite.

For hooks (1994), Freire provides the hope necessary for the enterprise of teaching: "I had never wanted to surrender the conviction that one could teach without reinforcing existing systems of domination. I needed to know that professors did not have to be dictators in the classroom" (p. 18). In fact, hooks (1994) goes on to challenge a Foucauldian analysis that suggests that student expression in the classroom is another

form of cultural reproduction by noting that engaged pedagogy, which is hooks's version of critical pedagogy, necessitates vulnerability on the part of the teacher as well as the students (p. 21). For her, it is possible to renegotiate power relationships in the classroom.

2.2.4 Critical Consciousness

The precursor for social change is a shift in thinking that Marxist scholars call critical consciousness. For Freire, critical consciousness, or *conscientization*, of the peasants of Brazil was the aim of critical pedagogy; his method of teaching literacy was meant to help Brazilian peasants understand the economic and social systems in which they were located. Freire, following a Marxist perspective, argues that there will be no change as long as the working classes are ignorant of their circumstances. Magaziner (2010), tracing the impact of Anne Hope, one of Freire's students, who worked with activists in South Africa, summarizes Freire's version of critical consciousness:

> As Freire's South African translators explained, literacy was not just about being able to read censored newspapers and exploitative labor contracts; instead, true literacy was about the construction of autonomous selves. Freire called for teachers not to preach but to listen, not to enforce ideology but to conscientize—a crude English term translated from the Portuguese conscientiçazão. (p. 129)

Post-colonialist thinkers like Memmi (2000) suggest that schools can be places of change and opportunities for students to learn empathy. Post-Marxists like Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) see progressive schools as a grounds for disrupting the false consciousness encouraged by traditional schooling. If sweeping back the curtain on power and privilege is not the aim but rather a more Freirean move toward critical consciousness on the part of marginalized students participating in service-learning, how does that impact the

pedagogy? Rondini (2015) describes a service-learning activity they used in a sociology course focused on health and community; they focus on the development of a critical consciousness in students as a result of the service-learning activities. Rondini's (2015) conclusions about the challenges of encouraging critical consciousness in service-learning students is profound:

> A challenge remains in continuing to develop mechanisms through which to effectively sustain critical inquiry, facilitate structural analyses, and encourage reflexive praxis in integrated service-learning courses, without ultimately compromising cultivation of student self-efficacy necessary to the pursuit of future social justice work in the process. (p. 144)

While Rondini worked with non-marginalized students (this study was conducted at a small, private liberal arts college), the stakes for this puzzle are significantly higher for marginalized students, whose feelings of self-efficacy can contribute positively to their completion of degree programs and whose communities are often viscerally affected by the social injustices in discussion.

In this study, I examined how students ostensibly participating in service-learning projects construed their identities and the degree to which they imagined agency within the figured worlds of school, service-learning activities, and their many other worlds. Critical service-learning offers possibilities for critical consciousness for students, but critical service-learning activities also offer students the possibility for action. That these activities took place at a two-year school, Shor's (1980) "historic flinging together of careerism and humanities" (p. 27) means that this research has important implications. As Shor (1980) notes, the college experiences of working class students will "affect the

temper and direction of American life" (p. 40). In this study, I describe a service-learning

project developed and implemented by a group of community college students and

explore the stories they tell about their experiences with the project and the community

college courses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the stories told by two-year college students completing service-learning projects as part of their work for an introductory composition course. The stories told by service-learning students suggest the ways these students understand themselves (their identities) and the ways they view service-learning. These stories also suggest the ways in which the students understand their own sense of agency as students and community members.

The research questions investigated by this study include:

1. What stories do marginalized community college students tell about themselves?

2. What stories do marginalized community college students tell about the service-learning projects they are conducting?

3. What moments of transformation, or movement from object to subject, happen in the course of these stories?

In order to answer these questions, I conducted an ethnographic study of a composition class engaging in service-learning. I spent time in the classroom with the students and teacher and conducted interviews of the students over the course of the semester.

3.1 Ethnography

This study is ethnographic in the sense that I discussed, contextualized, and told the story of a group of people at a particular place and time. As Lindquist (2002) tells it, "Regardless of its motives, scope, or focus, all ethnographic research begins and ends with the problem of culture" (p. 4). The culture of a classroom made up of primarily

marginalized students who are embarking, in many cases, on their first college experience and engaging in critical service-learning holds interest for anyone interested in teaching for social justice.

Peter McLaren (1994) in the preface to the "critical journaling" of his book *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*, points out that

> Every description is ideologically loaded, codified, and intertextually related to larger interpretative contexts. Nothing that can be observed or named is ideologically neutral or innocent. No thoughts, ideas, or theories are transparent, autonomous, or free floating; to say that they are is a middle-class mystification that seeks to disguise the social interests being served. Ideas are always and necessarily tied to particular interests and enciphered in particular relations of power, and tied to particular power/knowledge configurations. Absolutely nothing is of unmediated availability to human consciousness. (p. xv)

McLaren (1994), in reviewing his own teaching and thinking, evaluates the ways in which he was upholding oppressive social structures of schooling. McLaren's (1994) critical approach to his own experiences and observations is particularly important to this study because I am interested in the way students perceive power; my analysis, like McLaren's, is translated through my own lens of privilege. McLaren's (1994) work provides a model for doing this kind of ethnographic work.

Critical ethnography, as described by Kincheloe and McLaren (2005), comes from the tradition of critical theory, which in contemporary theoretical terms includes post-Marxist thought via the Frankfurt School, Foucault's genealogy, Derrida's

deconstruction, and postmodernism by way of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, and other such thinkers (p. 305). Traditional researchers in the academy tend to view qualitative research as an attempt at truth or at least "slice of life," but critical researchers are interested in research as a means of social action that can deal with injustice (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 305). Thomas (1993) argues that the aim of critical ethnography is to present events in ways that reveal macro-level power dynamics and injustice (p. 9). Despite these aims, critical ethnographers face issues in the narrativization and presentation of their research; critical ethnographic knowing must embrace fragmentation, ambiguity, and polyvocality because, otherwise, knowledge is codified in the same ways that traditional research and ethnographies seat knowledge with the researchers, who are often White and male (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 326).

Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) also address the issue of validity in critical ethnography. Rather than giving over the question of validity entirely to subjectivity and multiple realities that might rationally stem from poststructuralist perspectives, they review Carspecken's arguments on researcher positioning and the transparency of the researcher's values as a means of showing validity (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, pp. 327-328). Exemplifying this sort of positioning, Morrell et al. (2013) frame their own critical ethnography in this way:

> As ethnographers in the critical tradition, we have lived as educators in these
> schools and projects for more than a decade; we have advocated with and on
> behalf of the students and schools; we have, whenever possible, referenced the
> work and the voices of the students; and we have tried to situate this practice

within the larger project of social justice and educational transformation without qualms. (p. 46)

I have been an educator at South Community College for the past two years and, though I was an outsider to the classes and the participants in my research to a certain extent, I am a member of the community at South. I have also included the voices of the student participants with as much complexity and richness as possible by using their language and self-analysis, as the next section on coding and data analysis will demonstrate.

Critical ethnography is an appropriate choice for the study of critical service-learning; both practices come from the tradition of critical theory and share an interest in understanding power dynamics and institutions with an interest in social change. The orientation of critical ethnography toward research-as-social-change aligns with Mitchell's (2008) argument that critical service-learning is oriented toward social change. In doing this project, I am not a passive and neutral observer but a participating human with an interest in social change and educational equity.

As a component of that work, I collected observations of classroom interactions and interviews with students participating in service-learning. An important component of my study are the semi-structured and informal interviews conducted with participants. These interviews are real and important sites of discourse and meaning construction, which De Fina and Perrino (2011) underscore in their critique of those who argue that interviews are not "natural" interactions:

One unfortunate result of these attitudes has been that the interview as a real communicative event has been understudied. Our objective… is to contribute to redressing this tendency by drawing attention to the need for, and advantages of,

the research interview as a legitimate interactional encounter, and taking narrative

as our focus. (pp. 1-2)

In making this argument, De Fina and Perrino (2011) point to the positivist history of

qualitative research and the focus on "unbiased" knowledge (p. 3). De Fina (2011) points

out how interviews, if treated as "real" interactions, are opportunities for the co-

construction of knowledge:

the analysis also illustrates another important point about the interaction between

researchers, informants and contexts, that is, that both insider and outsider status

for researchers— and therefore also the informants' recognition of their position

as "observed"— may provide opportunities for insights into the nature of social

phenomena, as long as one is willing to treat research contexts as truly

interactional settings. (p. 36)

This analysis of research methodology seems particularly in line with the aims of critical

service-learning and the encouragement of participants toward conscientization via

reflection and self-awareness. Since my project is focused on questions of agency, agency

should also be considered in the context of research methodology. Beverley (2005)

examines the role of *testimonio* in qualitative research and notes the way in which

testimonial narrators are often relegated to the role of witness without "the power to

create their own narrative authority and negotiate its conditions of truth and

representativity" (p. 553). In this view of research participants, their perspectives are only

viewed through the lens of the researcher, who decides what and how to represent the

participants' voices; such a use of marginalized participants' voice could be used to

calcify hegemonic ideas, rather than challenge them (Beverley, 2005, p. 553). Beverley's

(2005) way of pushing back against this power dynamic is to center the relationship between the researcher and participant in representing the research and the voice of the participant; the power dynamic and tensions between researcher and participant can make hegemonic forces more transparent (pp. 554-555).

With the centering of these relationships in mind, I need to acknowledge that research conducted by a White researcher with students of color as some of the objects of that study is a troubling reflection of colonialism. Asante (2009) argues that "If we are to be serious about the process of decolonizing our minds we must pay attention to the very human and spiritual needs of our world." In this same essay, "Knowledge as Property: Who Owns What and Why," Asante (2009) points out the ways in which Western culture has capitalized knowledge and endeavors to keep it from marginalized communities. Additionally, Smith (2012) offers this important tool for engaging in the decolonization of research:

> Struggle is also a theoretical tool for understanding agency and social change, for making sense of power relations and for interpreting the tension between academic views of political actions and activist views of the academy. Theorizing the politics, psychology and pedagogy of struggle is the role of activist scholars and the organic intellectuals who work in that intersection between the community and the academy. It often presents itself as a phenomenon that researchers 'see' when they see communities living on the edge and in crisis, when they attempt to interpret or make ethnographic sense of life in the margin, when they attempt to account for behaviors, attitudes and value systems, and

when they attempt comparisons with their own communities and social class. (p.

200)

Struggle will be a methodological and interpretative tool for me as a person who tries to

make sense of the intersections of this study, the boundaries of theory, and how those

boundaries impact the actual lives of the human beings who perform them. My own

queer, White, middle-class identity informs my writing and thinking in this study, as it

does in all aspects of my life. In writing and theorizing here, I have tried to be transparent

about my own lived experiences while engaging with struggles happening in the

classrooms and community where I am working.

3.2 Research Context

3.2.1 Site Selection

The site for this study will be referred to as South Community College, a mid-

sized community college serving between 4000 and 5000 students each year. The college

is located outside a large urban area in the Southeast and serves three rural and suburban

counties. This college serves a diverse student body with an average student age of 27.

This college uses learning communities and service-learning projects in order to impact

student retention and completion of degree programs. The service-learning component of

the learning communities makes this an appropriate choice for this study.

At South Community College, learning communities are paired classes; students

who register for one of the paired classes must also register for the other. Additionally,

students who withdraw from one course must also withdraw from the other. These

courses are often paired around a theme. For the purpose of conducting this study, I

worked with the English department chair and the Dean of Arts and Sciences at South

Community College to identify a learning community to examine. Only two learning communities included composition courses during the fall semester of 2018, which narrowed down the options. Since I taught the other composition course with a learning community and the college did not want there to be a perception of conflict of interest, we identified the other composition course for this study. The learning community that was the focus of this study was titled, "Exploring Psychological Topics and Human Behavior Through Composition, Argumentation, and Research," and the two paired courses were English 101 and Psychology 201, which is the introductory psychology course at this college. English 101 is the introductory composition course that introduces students to the concepts of college argumentative writing. Both courses are common general education requirements taken by many students pursuing an associate's degree appropriate for transfer to a four-year school. The English 101 course was taught by a full-time English faculty member, and the Psychology 201 course was taught by a full-time humanities instructor.

I observed the English 101 class, taught by Carla, from September through December 2018 and interviewed her formally and informally on several occasions. She is a veteran community college English instructor, though she had only been at South Community College for a semester when she began teaching this learning community. She had limited experience with service-learning but an overall positive view of the practice before beginning this work. In the fall of 2018, Carla's course load included five English courses. She worked on campus five days a week and had a private office in the same building where she met most of her classes.

In every learning community at South Community College, students participate in a service-learning project that relates in some way to the content of the courses. As a colleague of both of the instructors for these paired classes, I worked with them as they developed ideas for service-learning projects over the summer before the fall semester. I attended the learning community training session in the spring of 2018 and led the professional development component on critical service-learning. The English course is writing-intensive with students completing a series of four out-of-class essays over the course of the semester including a minimum of 3000 polished words. Though I initially thought that these writing activities and focus on writing as a process would afford students the opportunity to critically reflect on their service-learning activities, that did not turn out to be the case.

3.2.2 Participants

All of the students enrolled in the paired learning community courses were invited to participate in the study. I attended a class meeting in September and was introduced to the class by Carla. At this meeting, I described my study to the class, invited them to participate, and answered questions about the study. I disseminated a description of the study and consent forms to all students in the class. Students who returned those consent forms were invited for interviews. Eleven students in the class returned consent forms, six of them came in for an initial interview, and four of those students came in for a second follow-up interview after the class project was concluded in December.

The six student participants I interviewed self-identified their race and gender. They also shared a bit about their background. Tim, the only male student who interviewed with me, identifies as Hispanic as was a recent high school graduate. Christa,

a Black female, Lenora, a White female, Vera, a White female, and Tara, a White female, were also recent high school graduates. Mackenzie, also a White female, was a non-traditional student with children who had returned to school to complete her education after a years-long stint of being a stay-at-home mom (see Table 1 for another view of this information).

Table 1. Participant Overview

Participant Name	Participant Role	Demographic descriptors
Carla	English 101 instructor at South Community college	Veteran community college instructor; White female
Tim	Learning community student participant	Recent high school graduate; Hispanic male
Christa	Learning community student participant	Recent high school graduate; Black female
Lenora	Learning community student participant	Recent high school graduate; White female
Mackenzie	Learning community student participant	Non-traditional student and parent; White female
Vera	Learning community student participant	Recent high school graduate; White female
Tara	Learning community student participant	Recent high school graduate; White female

3.2.3 Study Design

This study took place over ten weeks of the fall semester. I spent time in the classroom observing and working with students at 50-minute intervals two to three times

per week. I also invited students in the class to participate in semi-structured interviews in October and November and then again after the conclusion of the class project in December. These interviews took place in my office on the campus of South Community College and were tape-recorded.

3.3 Role of the Researcher

For the most part, I was an observer in the classroom, taking notes on classroom interactions and activities. Because I am also an English instructor, I was called on to participate in the class on a few occasions. I worked with a few groups of students on their essays, answered questions, and helped with logistics of the class project. I offered to assist the instructors with planning the project, but, other than my presentation at the required faculty workshop on learning communities and a few questions sent via email over the summer, I was not included in the conversations about the service-learning project that transpired in the course of the semester. Hague (2019) offers some insight into the role of the researcher in doing critical ethnography and emphasizes that the goal of critical ethnography is to bring about positive change in the conditions of participants; in her case, this applies to her social work context and to education in mine. In conducting and depicting this research, I am also inspired by the work of Wolcott (1990) who wrote:

> For my personal health, safety, and sanity, this time more than ever I need to get things as "right" as possible, and I feel a certain urgency about it. I do not compartmentalize my personal and professional lives: I personalize the world I research and intellectualize the world of my Experience. (p. 365)

Wolcott's (1990) thinking emphasizes the blurry lines that exist in my research, where I was always a researcher, a teacher, and a philosopher, in addition to my other lived identities; my interactions with my participants included me in my multiple guises. When I first began coding my transcribed interviews, I often thought that I veered too much into "teaching" territory with the students I interviewed when I encouraged them on their writing and exhorted them to go and talk to professors with whom they had difficulties. Reading Wolcott (1990), I am reminded that these moments are the natural outcomes of my multiple identities, the complexity of those interactions, and my own lens as a critical ethnographer and pedagogue.

3.4 Data Collection

I conducted regular class observations, two to three times per week for fifty minutes each (the length of a class session). I kept an observation notebook containing my notes and reflections on the class activities, discussions, and lectures I attended. I also used Coffey's (2018) Critical Service-Learning Observation Protocol to help me identify classroom activities and conversations that might be leading the class toward critical service-learning (see Appendix).

I conducted two rounds of interviews. The first round of interviews were conducted in October and November; all six student participants were included in this data set. The second round of interviews were conducted in December after the service-learning project was concluded; four of the student participants were included in this data set (Christa, Tara, Lenora, and Mackenzie), though all six of them were invited. Both Tim and Vera scheduled interviews but did not attend them. These semi-structured interviews were scheduled based on student convenience and scheduling. All interviews

were audio-recorded in my office at South Community College and transcribed using a combination of Kaltura, a secure, automated transcription tool, and my own transcription of the recordings.

I adapted many of these interview questions from a service-learning study conducted by Seider et al. (2013). My prepared questions for the first round of interviews included:

- What is your program and/or major?

- What are your career goals?

- How has your experience in the learning community been so far?

- What are you learning in your composition class?

- What have you liked the most about the learning community?

- What have you liked the least about the learning community?

- What led you to sign up for this learning community?

- Have you participated in any kind of community service previously? [If yes, tell me about it.]

- What are you expecting service-learning to be like?

- What do you think about community service generally? Is it a good deed or a responsibility?

Some of the questions I posed at the later set of interviews included:

- What has service-learning been like for you?

- Has service-learning been what you expected?

- Tell me about the classroom discussions about service-learning.

- Tell me about your experience with service-learning.

- o How much time have you spent on the service-learning activities?

- o Has it been challenging to fit this work into your schedule?

- o What has happened that is surprising or unexpected?

- o How have your beliefs about [topic of service-learning] shifted since you started this project?

- o Tell me about getting to know the other students working on the service-learning project.

- o Tell me about something challenging with the service-learning project.

- o Tell me about an interaction that has stuck in your head.

- o How do you feel about your experience with service-learning compared to your classmates' experiences?

- What is the purpose of service-learning?

- Do you feel like service-learning should be more common or required for college students?

- Has service impacted the way you think about community service?

- Do you imagine that you are more or less likely to participate in community service in the future as a result of this project?

- Are you glad you participated in this learning community?

- What would you change or do differently with this experience overall?

The goal of these interviews was to help me understand the stories students tell about themselves and about service-learning over the course of the semester.

Additionally, my observations of classroom interactions helped me develop a wider context for these stories.

3.5 Data Analysis

I used De Fina and Georgakopoulou's (2012) concept of small stories to help me analyze this data; small stories allow the researcher to focus on narratives that occur in specific, situated moments, as opposed to "grand narratives" that might otherwise exclude the conversation and narrative fragments small stories will allow me to include (p. 115-116). The social situation of such small stories is an integral part of the analysis (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 116). This data analysis technique is particularly useful because of the ways De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) see narrative relating to identity. They also offer some useful context for the ways in which researchers narrativize the stories of their research. Because my research questions are focused on identity and agency, this approach to data analysis makes sense. Additionally, because I sought moments of transformation, finding and analyzing these "small stories" made those moments of transformation visible.

Coding the reflections, observations, and interviews collected is a part of the meaning-making process; Saldana (2016) uses the metaphor of titling to describe coding, arguing that coding represents the "essence" of data in the same way that titles capture that central idea of other texts (p. 4). Deciding what pieces of the data to code and how to code them will be a crucial part of the analysis process. Saldana (2016) points out the extent to which this method is a craft; it is not quantitative research (p. 41). Thomas (1993) contends that interpreting data only in ways that serve our research goals and imposing a meaning on the data are "traps" to be avoided when it comes to critical

ethnography (p. 62). In order to keep the process of coding from being reductive and in order to center the voices of the participants, I used in vivo coding. In vivo coding honors the language of the participants by using that language as the coding (Saldana, 2016, p. 106).

In vivo coding is an appropriate choice for a study on critical service-learning and my research questions in particular because I am interested in capturing the experience of the participants, which Saldana (2016) points out as one of the benefits of in vivo coding (p. 106). Additionally, in vivo coding created some struggle for me as a researcher in understanding the stories of my participants from their own lenses and perspectives without immediately trying to fit their stories into my own schema, thus helping me avoid Thomas's (1993) trap. This kind of struggle is important because Smith (2012) points out how some assumptions of Western history and philosophy are not the assumptions of all cultures; she specifically discusses race and gender, individuals and society, time, and space (pp. 44-59). In vivo coding gives me one tool to avoid installing my own perceptions of reality onto participants. Ladson-Billings and Donnor (2005) point out that decolonizing research must seek to break down dichotomies about race, ethnicity, and gender that Western research takes for granted; they suggest that narrative, voice, and metaphor are methodologies that are capable of doing this kind of work (p. 291). Adhering closely to the language of participants allowed me to make those moves in analysis.

In vivo coding was first stage of analysis. In my study, I used narrative analysis to further understand and interpret the stories students tell about service-learning projects and their own part in those projects. Narrative analysis is troubled water from the outset;

there is disagreement about whether narrative is an epistemology or a method (De Fina &

Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 19). Ethnography, as Blommaert would have it, is a way of

knowing, with analysis being applied later in many cases (De Fina & Georgakopoulou,

2012, p. 19). De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) provide a way of understanding

narrative and analyzing identities as components of narrative that is useful for my study

of critical service-learning. For one thing, I am interested in the stories participants tell

about themselves and about service-learning; I need a narrative analysis technique in

order to answer those research questions. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) provide a

way of understanding identity through the kinds of stories participants tell about

themselves in interviews and in other mediums (like reflections).

De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) also offer an appropriately social

constructivist view on identity within narratives. Their preferred version of identity is that

it is fragmented and relational. In terms of fragmentation, De Fina and Georgakopoulou

(2012) see identity as shifting based on time and space; they do not encourage a search

for a unified and coherent identity narrative, as have some previous narrative analysts

have done (p. 161). For De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) relationality has to do with

the way speakers organize their identities in juxtaposition with other speakers' stories and

identities (p. 161). They also contend that this coherent and ordered version of identity

privileges a Western view of individuality (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 161),

which is another reason that this "small stories" approach is more in line with my

decolonized project. By emphasizing fragmented and relational identities, De Fina and

Georgakopoulou (2012) move toward another way of understanding the connection

between identities and social meta-narratives; these connective roles include roles the

participants take on in the structure of the story, actions taken by the participants with the storytelling, and the linguistic choices made by the participants (p. 182). This approach to the stories told by participants continues to provide opportunities to connect to large Discourses and identities but without allowing the shapes of small stories to emerge and frame identities in ways that might not be predicted by meta-narratives (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 190).

De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) offer a few different ways of constructing identity in interactions: identities as self-presentation, identities as social categories, the indexicality of identities, and identities-in-interaction. Identities as self-presentation perspectives analyze how stories depict particular versions of self, with values and morals that are revealed through the identities of speakers in telling stories (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, pp. 167-171). Identities as social categories on the basis of race, ethnicity, or some other group membership is another way of construing identity (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, pp. 171-166). Indexicality points to the ways in which speakers align particular identities with "qualities, ideas, social representations and entire ideological systems" (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 176). Identities-in-interaction focus more on conversation dynamics and how identities are construed in conversations. Antaki and Widdicombe's five principles of identities in the context of conversations include:

- "Having an identity" means being associated with a category with a set of particular features.
- This sort of identity construction is indexical and specific to a time and place.

- The identity is relevant to the conversation dynamic.

- The identity has an impact (or effect) on the conversation; that is, the identity has an impact on the actions of the participants.

- These other principles are available in the structure of the interaction. (as cited in De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 179)

These guidelines on how to analyze identities within interactions are important to my own process of analyzing stories told by participants.

For an example of how this analysis operates, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) provide a story of violence told by one of their participants, Antonio, and their analysis of that story. De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) explore Antonio's use of language to critique a social structure and position himself within that structure:

Antonio starts building on the relevance of this description of his assailants in racial terms for the development of the story world action when he recounts that the police that they notified of the assault asked "how many Hispanics" there were. Notice the function of the expression "on top of it" in the same line to signal Antonio's evaluation of the police intervention as something that "topped" the negativity of the experience. (p. 187)

Here De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) analyze the linguistic choices Antonio makes and then analyze the way he construes identity; they argue that Antonio is creating identities indexically, by juxtaposing Hispanic and Black identities in this story.

My research questions are focused on understanding the identities construed by participants and how they perceive their own agencies as students conducting service-learning projects. Rather than allowing my analysis to be overtaken by meta-narratives

and positions suggested by Discourses, De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) offer a mode of narrative analysis that examines conversations and stories on a smaller scale while still considering the interplay of those overarching Discourses. This strategy may also make non-Western, non-normalized, anti-hegemonic strategies on the part of participants more evident to the researcher.

Ultimately, in undertaking critical ethnography and then in analyzing the narratives that come from that study, it is important for me to embrace a stance of resistance. Ladson-Billings and Donner (2005) argue for a need to decolonize research and the work of the academy, and they end their piece on Critical Race Theory in qualitative research with a call for researchers to consider how they can change themselves (p. 298), which is perhaps a crucial precursor of challenging hegemonic values and systems. Ladson-Billings and Donner (2005) write:

> Thus, the challenge of those of us in the academy is not how to make those outside the academy more like us, but rather to recognize the "outside the academy" identities that we must recruit for ourselves in order to be more effective researchers on behalf of people who can make use of our skills and abilities… Our challenge is to renounce our paternalistic tendencies and sympathetic leanings to move toward an empathic, ethical, and moral scholarship that propels us to a place where we are prepared to forcefully and courageously answer "the call." (p. 298)

Research and universities are highly stable institutions. In doing critical ethnography and critical service-learning, we must be prepared for resistance and adherence to the status

quo. The move from Butin's (2010) "dreaming" to social action requires this institutional destabilization.

3.6 Ethical Issues

Participation in this study was by consent. Students willing to be interviewed signed consent forms. I also abided by the tenets for research set by the Institutional Review Board.

3.7 Limitations

Like all qualitative studies, this data cannot be generalized to other students or campuses, though the work may suggest frameworks for understanding service-learning at two-year campuses. Additionally, this study followed the participants for brief periods; time and resources to study the impact of service-learning on participants over a longer period of time would certainly yield helpful data.

3.8 Delimitations

Although there is quantitative data available for this group of participants (including grades), this study is focused on the stories told by the participants engaging in service-learning projects. Though data like grades might be an important ways of construing student success, this study is more focused on the potential for agency and self-efficacy that service-learning offers. That said, grades certainly do matter and relate to the material circumstances of the students, particularly those students who did not pass the course or courses. My future research will certainly continue to grapple with the issue of grades and their relationship to student agency.

3.9 Summary

In this study, I observed and interviewed a group of community college students doing a service-learning project as a component of their learning community. My analysis portrays the ways these participants self-identified as students and service-learning participants and how they imagined their experience doing service-learning. I also explore moments of transformation, when the students saw themselves as the subjects instead of the objects of their own learning and work.

CHAPTER FOUR: "THEY JUST PUT ME IN THIS CLASS"

Our scene opens in medias res. It is 11 a.m., and the final preparations for the event are underway. A couple of college students are adding post-it notes with affirmations to a "take what you need" wall. A group of men are stirring bowls of slime and checking the directions. Someone is fiddling with the sound system. The Counseling Center has set up a table with information about services available to students, and a counselor is stationed at the table. Groups of attendees are already milling around, interested in the activities being prepared. Finally, Carla rushes in with a thick stack of coloring sheets to pass out, and everything just begins without an official "moment." Groups of students begin selecting coloring sheets and markers, classical musical plays on the sound system, and someone announces, "the slime is ready!" The service-learning event, intended to mitigate anxiety and depression felt by college students preparing for exams, is finally underway.

4.1 Prelude

Before the semester even began, the college organized a required workshop for faculty teaching learning communities. This training included research and suggestions on the implementation of the learning community concept. At South Community College that implementation meant that students were required to enroll in both learning community courses; additionally, if students were withdrawn from one of the classes, they were required to be withdrawn from the other course. This model is meant to encourage the development of relationships among students in the learning community courses; the requirement to be enrolled in both courses is also intended to decrease the number of withdrawals, since a student would be required to withdraw from both courses,

a situation that would be more likely to impact their status as a full-time student and financial aid. Teachers of learning community courses are expected to co-teach lessons at least three times in the course of the semester. Additionally, at least three assignments are to be planned so that students can turn them in for credit for both learning community courses, although faculty might evaluate those assignments for different criteria. Finally, the two faculty members and students in the classes are to participate in a required service-learning activity. Though the service-learning is a required component of the courses, grading the service-learning is not required.

Because of my research on service-learning, I prepared some of the content on service-learning for this faculty development session, which was held the May prior to the fall semester. When I presented it to the group, I focused on critical service-learning and presented Mitchell's (2008) diagram illustrating the differences between traditional service-learning and critical service-learning (see Figure 2). My presentation emphasized student agency and choice in the process and the development of authentic relationships with community partners. I chose to focus my presentation in this way because I had listened to faculty who had taught learning communities in previous semesters, and they usually planned the service-learning projects before the semester had started or students had attended class. These faculty also tended to talk about the lack of student investment in the service-learning projects they led. Examples of such projects included a stuffed animal drive and a used clothing drive.

The teachers at the workshop seemed generally receptive to my presentation. I fielded a good number of questions during the presentation and afterwards during the work time faculty participated in as a part of the workshop. Both of the learning

community co-teachers attended the training. Prior to the training, Carla had a positive idea of service-learning, though limited experience with implementing it, based on her experiences at a different community college in a neighboring state. Although her co-teacher originally wanted to plan the service-learning project for the students and have them create brochures on mental health issues, Carla persuaded her to try a more student-centered approach and allow the students to choose the direction of the project.

4.1.1 The Part When the Plan Comes Together

Development of learning community curriculum continued over the summer, and by August the plans were laid. The learning community was called: Exploring Psychological Topics and Human Behavior Through Composition, Argumentation, and Research. This title and a description for the learning community was circulated among faculty advisors and enrollment services in an effort to recruit students to enroll in the courses. The circulated description read: "This course will introduce students to scientific concepts of human behavior as they work to develop their writing skills." Additionally, they planned three writing assignments that would meet requirements for both classes. The first such assignment was a summary-critique essay, an assignment requiring to students to summarize and analyze the rhetorical strategies of an article; the article chosen would be a text related to the discussion of nature versus nurture in the psychology course. The second assignment was an essay requiring students to evaluate the depiction of mental disorders in film; students would choose from a list of films offered by the instructors. Students were to use the DSM (the seminal psychology handbook listing symptoms for various mental disorders) to evaluate the portrayals of the disorders in the films. The final shared assignment was a proposal for a treatment plan

based on the disorder analyzed for the previous paper; this writing required additional research and sources. The service-learning project was left open-ended at this time with the intention that the students take charge of the project.

None of these writing assignments really related to the service-learning project directly, though the content of the courses related to the direction of the service-learning. Although Carla had originally suggested that students would write reflections about the service-learning project, in the end this was an optional writing activity that only one student in the class completed. That one reflection was eventually published in the South Community College student newsletter as a testimonial for learning communities.

4.2 Exposition

I began attending the English 101 class meetings with Carla in September. The class met three days per week for fifty minutes. At this point in the semester, most of the content was focused on composition, though there was plenty of focus on psychology as students developed content for their writing assignments. On the first day I observed the class, students had just received their first graded essays back from Carla and were writing reflections about the process of writing the first essay. To elicit these reflections, Carla gave students a handout with instructions to review their grades and feedback, label their papers in a particular format, and then respond to her questions "in complete sentences and write as legibly as you can." This reflection included eight questions about their writing process, strengths and weaknesses on the essay, expectations regarding grades, the transferability of the writing assignment, and goals for the second essay. After students completed these reflections, Carla responded to each one individually in writing.

At this point in the semester, Carla mentioned "the service-learning project" with some regularity, but I discovered from individual interviews with students that most of them did not really understand what she was talking about. In fact, none of the students I interviewed understood that service-learning was a requirement of the course or had a clear understanding of what that entailed until plans were being made in earnest in October and November. Tara points out in an interview that "When I went into this service-learning thing, I didn't know what it was. I didn't even know why I was doing that. I just happened to notice that I had both English and psych in the same classroom with the same people, and I was like what's going on. I didn't sign up for this." Similarly, Christa said that "I was just put in the class," a thought also echoed by Tim.

Though service-learning was frequently mentioned, the goals of critical service-learning were not fore fronted in the class. Content was presented and discussed in a traditional format, which little discussion of privilege or analysis of how perspective relates to interpretation. I applied Coffey's (2018) Critical Service-Learning Observation Protocol in order to determine how elements of critical service-learning were being applied and developed during lessons. In an upcoming section, I will detail the data gleaned from this observation protocol.

The students stayed in the same classroom for the next 50-minute class section, which was when the psychology course met. Students usually stayed in the classroom and chatted or worked in between the two classes. Carla often stayed in this break as well, talking with students and answering questions.

4.3 Rising Action

Though the content in September and early October did not reflect much attention to service-learning, the project came much more into focus in mid-October. These conversations all originated in the English 101 class and were initiated by Carla, who had taken the lead in implementing a student-designed project after encouraging her co-teacher away from a teacher-designed project. Aside from the decision to include students in planning, there was not much discussion of the project between the teachers in these months.

4.3.1 Brainstorming the Project

The initial conversations about service-learning occurred during English 101 class meetings. One day in October, Carla shifted to service-learning about halfway through the class period: "In this learning community, we do a service-learning project. We look to think of how to combine the content (psychology and research writing) and impact the larger South Community College campus. What are some things you think we could do as a class that will combine psychology and research writing and would benefit students at South?"

Lenora immediately jumped into the conversation and suggested researching ways to resolve anxiety and stress. One of her colleagues responded by pointing out that they should research what impacts most students. Depression, he pointed out, affects 25% of people. Lenora agreed and noted that anxiety and depression correlate.

Mackenzie interjected, "So an event? A de-stress event?"

Lenora said yes: "We could show our research at the event."

"Good ideas are coming out of this," Carla said approvingly. Sensing some building enthusiasm, she asked "How many of you would be interested in doing an event?"

Mackenzie nodded. "With games."

Carla: "Sessions, events…"

Lenora was bouncing enthusiastically. "A positivity board. A take-what-you-need board!"

Another classmate said, "Let's do an event!"

Crista added, directing her comment to a few students in the class: "Remember that thing?" She referenced a local high school, and several students nodded their heads, apparently recalling a similar event at a high school.

Mackenzie pointed out that they'll need to have food.

"Coloring relieves stress," said Carla.

"There could be a fact in the coloring!" Lenora replied.

"With MLA documentation at the bottom," Carla grinned.

Carla eventually closed by saying that she made notes and that they will revisit in a couple of weeks. She also requested some service-learning captains, and Mackenzie, Lenora, and Tara immediately volunteered.

"I want us to crush this thing. I want people to be inspired by you and want to take a learning community class. And we'll feel good too. Doing good for others is good for yourself."

As I left the classroom that day, I saw Lenora, still bouncing a little. "I'm so excited about this.

4.3.2 Drafting the Project

The more official kick-off of the service-learning project came about one week later when the psychology co-teacher came to the end of an English 101 class meeting. During this discussion, Carla invited students to brainstorm service-learning ideas. She stood at the dry-erase board and jotted student ideas. Both teachers noted at the beginning of the discussion that the service-learning project needed to incorporate both writing and psychology in some way. After a quick review of the suggested focus on anxiety and depression, the students were asked to consider the goals and products of the project.

Lenora: "A packet of things that you can do to combat anxiety and depression."

Carla asked, "What resources are we providing or creating? Are we leaning toward an event?"

Lenora suggested bringing dogs on campus for a petting station, but the logistical issues of having animals on campus were quickly pointed out to her.

The students then bring up "free hugs" and offering hugs to people who want them. This idea was dismissed on the basis of the potential for unwanted sexual contact.

Carla asked, "What about coloring?"

Another student said, "How about those things you stick your hand in?"

Tim jumped in: "Ideas! You give out goodie bags with candy and resources where they can get help.

Crista asked if there will be multiple different stations. Somebody replied to her, saying that people could go to different stations. Carla pointed out that they can reach out to Counseling Services to see if they have any leftover materials about screening.

Another student asked, "What if we had a station with a Disney karaoke machine?"

Someone else looks around. "Does anyone have a karaoke machine?"

The student with the Disney karaoke idea said right away, "I have a karaoke machine."

Lenora: "This is going to be amazing. I'm so excited."

By the end of this class session, some students have volunteered to send emails and communicate with Counseling Services. The plan has an outline.

Tara shared her frustration about this planning meeting:

Whenever we were talking in the class, our ideas kept getting shot down and we were all like uh, you know? I understand why they got shot down, but it was frustrating. Me and Abby and a couple of the students, we were the leaders of it. We had this idea that was like Free Hugs on our t-shirts. It was completely voluntary. You could hug us if you wanted to, but you didn't have to. And they told us we couldn't do that because it's sexual harassment or something like that. But it's voluntary.

4.4 The Project

After the project concluded, all of the participants except for Tim and Vera participated in a follow-up interview with me. In this interview, we talked about their impressions of the event, how they thought it turned out, and what they learned from the process.

Christa's reflection on the project covers the broad swaths:

I don't know if was exactly what everyone visioned in their head. But really, I

don't think anything really is. They had different stations. We had music playing.

They pretty much had everybody singing *High School Musical*. We had cool

stress-relieving things, coloring, I think there was slime. I think there were little

pamphlets for stress and depression. I think it really helped people.

On the day of the event, I noticed that Christa stayed for the entire program, even staying

a bit after to help with clean-up. In her follow-up interview, she revealed that she had

wanted to snag a balloon for her cousin who loves balloons (she did not get one). During

most of the event, she sat with her classmates, singing and coloring.

Lenora described the project after the fact in this way:

I really think we made an impact on a lot of people's daily lives because I mean

people pass through that building every day, they just don't really pay attention to

what's happening. But I think that the fact that we put something in there and

showed them it's okay to be sad sometimes or it's okay to feel stressed out, to

have anxiety, that it's normal and that everyone goes through it. And then they got

to color and play with slime and do different things. Because you know it's finals

week. It's kind of stressful. Everyone is just a ball of stress. So I think we might

have helped some people along the way.

Lenora and Tara were easily some of the most enthusiastic participants from the

beginning, and both volunteered as project leaders. Lenora was involved throughout the

day of the event and valued the connections made through this project, the learning

community, and even through my research. She has continued to stop by my office to

check in and chat even months after the fact.

For Tara, it was important that everyone in the class participated and not just the smaller group of student leaders:

> Every single person did something, and that's a lot different from usual classes. I remember in our first interview you asked me, did this learning community help you? This has been my most successful class that I really take it seriously. Other classes are easy, but this was one that I really wanted to engage in. I really had fun with these classes.

Like Lenora, Tara spent the entire event engaged and participatory.

4.5 Falling Action

The semester was over before the service-learning event could really be digested by the faculty or the students. The event took place in December, and within the next two weeks exams and final projects were in full swing. The sudden end of the semester certainly had something to do with the very few reflections collected by Carla; even the class debriefing of the service-learning project was delayed and hastily covered. Participants told me in interviews that the class briefly discussed the project at the end of a psychology exam review. They seem to agree that the event was a huge success, with the fact that eighty students signed in and attended being the most-cited evidence for success by students and faculty. The most opportunity for reflection really came from those students who came and debriefed their experiences in interviews with me.

Christa did follow up with me later and let me know that she, in the end, did not pass English. She ended up taking a Wintermester online English 101 course in order to make up the credit. She knew, in fact, that she would not be passing the class by the time of the service-learning event, but had to stay in the English course and take the F in order

to get the credit for the psychology class, which she was passing. I learned from Carla that Tim also had failed the English 101 course in the end as well. The last time I saw him was at the service-learning event, as he sat happily coloring with a group of his colleagues.

Christa described her struggles with composition. She said that she frequently did not understand what she was supposed to be writing and did not understand the assignment sheets she was given. She also talked about writing the way she talks, which she thinks causes her problems in writing clearly: "Cause I write just how I talk, so that's a big issue. Grammar-wise, it's an issue." Tim did not complete the first essay of the semester for composition and was not able to recover his grade. Carla suggested that he also knew that he would not pass the class by the time of the class project. In his interview with me, Tim noted, "But I'm not that good of a writer when it comes to like writing papers, so I struggle with it a lot so I feel like that's the only thing that I would ever keep me from having a good grade in like English and writing classes."

CHAPTER FIVE: BUT WAS IT SERVICE-LEARNING?

In this chapter, I will revise and complicate the narrative of the semester in the learning community and try to understand the relationship between service-learning pedagogies and the student stories told. I will then imagine a retelling of this story that reframes the possibilities for future classrooms. The research questions investigated by this study include:

1. What stories do marginalized community college students tell about themselves?

2. What stories do marginalized community college students tell about the service-learning projects they are conducting?

3. What moments of transformation, or movement from object to subject, happen in the course of these stories?

5.1 But Was It Critical Service-Learning?

As discussed in chapter two, critical service learning can be differentiated from service-learning on the basis of both purpose and practice. Butin (2010) describes some different purposes for service-learning; cultural, political, and antifoundational purposes could all be construed as critical service-learning. Technical purposes might be aligned with traditional service-learning but not critical service-learning. Mitchell (2008) describes an orientation toward social justice, work toward power restructuring, and the development of authentic relationships as necessary practices for critical service-learning (p. 53). Coffey's (2018) Critical Service-Learning Observation Protocol has helped me to operationalize these theoretical understandings in actual classroom practice.

What actually happened in the classroom is nuanced. Coffey's (2018) observation protocol provides a framework for breaking down some of that world of nuance. The first criteria of injustice was only minimally addressed in classroom discussions. Though there was some discussion of how people with mental disorders are often marginalized in school despite the prevalence of anxiety and depression, this was not a focal point of discussion or action. During the early planning phase of the project, Carla spent some effort pointing how that these mental disorders touch almost everyone and that they can impact school performance. Reframing of perspectives often happened in the discussion of service-learning. Students regularly imagined struggling students and how they might feel on the commuter campus; for example, during the idea development phase students thought that some students might feel isolated and want connections, which is where the "free hugs" suggestion originated. Questioning power structures and clarifying privilege rarely happened in these discussions; students and faculty generally accepted the status quo without consideration of how power operated or could be redistributed; a social justice perspective and awareness of privileges are components of critical service-learning, so their absence from this classroom suggests the distance from the practice of critical service-learning. In interviews there were moments of potential around the idea of service and power. Mackenzie, who was a nontraditional student, noted in an interview that "I think service is beneficial more to the person doing it than the person receiving it. You can be having the worst day of your life, but if you help somebody it somehow makes your day better." These sorts of insights were less apparent in the whole group conversations around the project.

There was more progress in the development of authentic relationships; in this area, the service-learning project shifted those relationships significantly. The teachers allowed the students to take the lead on making decisions about the project, even though this power shift was clearly outside of their comfort zones. Carla encouraged the students to brainstorm ideas and wrote everything on the board, even the ideas that seemed unlikely to be used. She was welcoming of student ideas, and her teaching style is normally quite teacher-centered; her composition-oriented lessons involved activities like grammar worksheets, Modern Language Association (MLA) citation worksheets, and PowerPoint lectures on strategies for writing introductions. Her movement toward student-driven instruction with the project stood out. The teachers also encouraged the students to take the lead in developing relationships both with staff in the counseling center and with South Community College students who would be served by the event they planned. In her post-event interview, Lenora said this about the planning and implementation process: "It was mainly planned by the students. Carla and [the psychology teacher], they were just writing stuff on the board. They were helping us get through the red tape because they had the actual authority, so they were making the phone calls. But we wrote a lot of the emails, we wrote the invitations. We did a majority of the planning." Lenora suggested that she felt more confident in her leadership abilities as a result of such activities.

I saw minimal or no evidence of posing questions, challenging assumptions, or accepting privilege. There was some discussion of issues that were important to the participants; in the classroom discussions and planning of the service-learning project as well as in their individual interviews, students discussed anxiety and depression with

some openness, though there was little reframing of those issues in the wider context of social status, race, or gender. In her interviews, Mackenzie, for example, opened up about her struggles, with her partner being restricted to a wheelchair and then her returning to school after being a stay-at-home mom. She talked about how helping others, like working with the elderly through her church, actually enriched her own life and helped her negotiate challenges. Lenora also explored some of the complexities of service in her interviews: "It's not just about me. It's not about my grade. It's about these other people I need to help and make sure they get the help that they need." She continued to talk about "saving the Earth" and realizing that people have to take responsibility for their actions. Her comments reflect little awareness of privilege, though there is the opening for that kind of conversation in her thoughts. Without classroom reflections and conversation to help center and reframe these perspectives on service and learning, students do not have the opportunity for critical transformation.

5.1.1 Classroom Spaces and Critical Possibilities

Coffey's (2018) Critical Service-Learning Observation Protocol also draws connections between classroom spaces and routines and critical learning and thinking. Shor (1980) writes: "It's a tricky business to organize an untraditional class in a traditional school" (p. 128).

In terms of classroom space, Carla's class almost always operated in a traditional structure with the teacher at the front of the class and students neatly seated in rows. In reviewing my notes, I cannot find an example of a day that looked particularly different, with students leading from the front of the room or even clusters of desks being moved into groups. Though my presence was not ubiquitous, I can say that roundtables or groups

were not habits of mind in the classroom for either students or teachers. This traditional classroom set up supports a banking model of education, with the teacher viewed as the source of knowledge, which is transferred to the students, as Freire (2000) classically describes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. There are institutional elements to the traditional classroom structure; at South Community College, some of the buildings have not been significantly renovated since the 1960s, and even classroom chairs and tables visually seem to date from the 1990s. The digital technology in the classroom is a projector linked to one computer at the front of the computer. All of these institutional structures make it more difficult for students and faculty to make changes. The desks, for example, are large and unwieldy. When I compare these classrooms to classroom spaces at the four-year university where I taught composition previously, those spaces are geared toward collaboration, with rolling chairs and dispersed screens and devices, while classrooms at the community college are designed for teacher-led lectures. Shor (1980), whose working on critical teaching also took place at two-year schools describes the relationship between literal places and the feelings evoked for students and teachers who inhabit them:

> The surfaces of floors, chairs, tables, walls and doors communicate unyielding messages: concrete, steel, asphalt, formica, fiberglass, mason-blocks, brick, tile, aluminum. A cold fluorescent light bathes these textures. The cheapness, the coldness, the drabness and the hardness of the surfaces combine with the bad food, functional design of exteriors, and roaring noise of the expressway, to tell you that you should leave this place, that you and this college are not very important in American higher education. (p. 79)

Shor's (1980) descriptions resonate with my own experiences at South Community College and other two-year schools. When we think about designing spaces for critical thinking and collaboration at two-year schools, these institutional factors must concern us.

Even the planning of the service-learning project, which was student-led, as were the subsequent implementation planning discussions, took place with the teachers at the front of the room and students seated. This discussion did highlight the modicum of openness in the room; Carla wrote all ideas on the board initially, signally an openness to what everyone had to say. Though all students were invited to participate, this discussion was dominated by White women. There were moments of discomfort and disagreement, as we shall see.

In critical service-learning, even classroom structures look quite different. The institutional centering of the teacher is often mitigated by clustering of students into groups or in circles, a practice with shifts the attention of the students to each other, rather than the front of the classroom. Although his work is critical pedagogy and not critical service-learning, Shor (1980) describes project development in his community college classroom as one with a similar openness to Carla's but with a critical framing that impacts the direction of the project, and Shor in 1980 was not only dealing with similar institutional constraints in terms of classroom space but also limited (if any) digital technology.

The pedagogy of the classroom demonstrates little evidence of movement toward critical service-learning. I found little evidence of students' backgrounds and experiences being elicited, though they sometimes volunteered that information. In interviews they

were often willing to share some of their stories and experiences, but there were no classroom moments that centered those experiences or funds of knowledge brought by students; such funds of knowledge include the experiences, understandings, and ways of knowing with which students enter classrooms (Moll et al., 1992). The awareness of background and experience is important for both students and teachers in critical service-learning. It is an understanding of personal history that leads to discussion and reflection about privilege. Most problematic is the lack of inclusion of reflection and opportunities for reflection, at least in regard to service-learning. One of the shared values of traditional service-learning and critical service-learning is the need for cycles of reflection, and this classroom really did not offer those opportunities. Carla did ask students to respond reflectively to their writing; after each of the first three essays, she asked them to compose reflections in response to questions. The questions she posed to her students suggest her clear understanding of the need for metacognition and the development of self-awareness of her students as writers. Although she had thought in the planning stages that she would have the students reflect on service-learning as well, in the end she only offered it as "extra credit," which certainly did not center the practice or indicate its importance to the students. The directions on Carla's post-essay reflections also indicate that she sees reflection as a directive activity; her instructions emphasize neatness and request a specific order for the header of the document. This process of reflection is indicative of the power relationship in the classroom and does not suggest a dialogic relationship, even though she did respond to the students' reflections personally. Reflection also is not just an assignment or a series of assignments but a habit of mind in a service-learning classroom. Encouraging students to consider the whys and not just the

hows of service encourages personal growth and understanding even outside of social justice or grappling with power relationships. Reflection is also not just a student-only activity; in a critical classroom, I would expect to see both teachers and students reflecting on writing and service-learning.

This classroom did not demonstrate critical service-learning, and that is of particular importance considering what happened in the end, and the lack of success in the class of two of my interview participants, who were the only two racial minorities I interviewed. There is nothing that can be generalized about interview data from six students, but this information is noteworthy nonetheless.

5.2 But Was It Even Service-Learning?

The answer to the question of whether critical service-learning was happening in this particular classroom at South Community College is an unequivocal no; ultimately, the project did not focus on issues of injustice, power, and inequality. On the other hand, service-learning operates within a range of possible purposes and practices, as Butin's (2010) taxonomy of purposes for service-learning suggests, and there is some movement toward a version of service-learning in the implementation of this project, especially when the actual implementation of the project in the classroom by the students is framed by the original concept: a project that would have been carried out by the students with no input on the concept. In my most generous understanding of the service-learning happening at South Community College, service-learning has a *technical* purpose there, to use Butin's (2010) taxonomy of service-learning practices; the goal of service-learning at this institution is to engage students with course content and with the campus (p. 8). Even though student engagement may be the goal of the work that is called service-

learning at South, the implementation of that work, without a community partnership or development of knowledge about the community (not just the course content), is not really service-learning at all.

Service-learning necessitates a relationship between students and a community of some kind. For this project, the class imagined their community as the South Community College campus; that construction of the community partner for the project was entirely visioned by Carla, who stated at the beginning of the brainstorming process that the class would be looking for ways to "benefit students at South." From the outset, students had that particular community as the focus, and their consideration of the project never required them to enter dialogue with community members. Although students in the class did interact with Counseling Center staff, these interactions were not to learn about the community. Both the students and instructors assumed that they already knew the community because they were community members. This assumption is problematic on multiple levels. Most of the students in an introductory English class are in their first or second semester on the campus anyway, so their "membership" in the group of college students generally or South students specifically is still tentative. Even at four-year colleges, the issue of recidivism and return after the first-year is an issue; first-year college students do not all develop an identity of "college student" right away. For students traditionally marginalized in education, the problem is more pronounced. At two-year colleges, with a higher percentage of students marginalized on the basis of race and class, the additional concerns of a commuter campus make identification as a "college student" more difficult. Although students like Lenora and Tara clearly did identify as a college students and felt like members of the campus community by

November, that identity probably was not as strong for many students in the classroom.

For example, in her interview Vera described the South campus as welcoming but also

described her transition:

> Being in college is definitely a new experience. Being homeschooled, I was
>
> always at home. I did my stuff at work. I didn't really go out unless I worked. But
>
> mainly it was just school, work, come back home and repeat it. College is
>
> definitely something new because I'm in a real classroom now, so I'm sort
>
> adapting to that.

Tim described his start to the semester in even starker terms: "I kind of started off really

bad because I wasn't putting one hundred percent into it. Like I wanted to drop out, so it

was like I said, I started off on a bad note." Even though Lenora and Tara's voices were

much louder in the context of the classroom and discussions, Vera and Tim were also

there and, at least in October, felt a more tenuous connection to the campus.

Of course, there were many ways that this relationship with the community could

have been reframed. One way would be an investigative stance from the beginning.

Instead of immediately developing ideas of ways to help, the students and teachers could

have wondered what the community needed and even who South Community College

students are, leading to an inquiry into mental health and the student community on the

campus. Such inquiries could have included discussions with Counseling Center staff as

well as students willing to talk openly about mental health. Wilhelm, Douglas, and Fry

(2014) suggest that an inquiry-based approach to service-learning is necessary for

preparing students for critical service-learning, but some level of inquiry is perhaps

necessary for a reflective cycle at all.

The absence of a reflective cycle is another crucial concern for identifying this project as service-learning. Reflection encourages students to consider what they have learned from service-learning activities and is a component of traditional service-learning as well as critical service-learning. The teachers certainly intended to include reflective cycles in the course, and Carla clearly communicated this plan to me in our early conversations about plans for the learning community and even into the semester when we talked about how students were processing the idea of service-learning. It is likely that time and the requirements of their courses got in the way of that plan. In the end, Carla offered extra credit for the completion of a reflection on the service-learning project, but only one student in the class completed that reflection. Carla did incorporate reflection in her writing class; for example, after each of the first three essays was completed and graded, students would write a reflective letter in response to a set of questions she posed, and she would respond. This cycle of reflective and dialogue would have been important for the service-learning components of the class as well.

The curriculum of the course did not reflect service-learning in general. Even though the words "service-learning project" were often mentioned, students did not have any idea about what service-learning was in their interviews. In fact, this trend continued in the second interview. In her post-project interview, Lenora said: "And I think that's what service-learning community kind of put into perspective is that there's a whole lot of other people that go here and a whole lot of people going through the same stuff that you are." Her comment does not particularly suggest an understanding of service-learning aligned with the purposes set out in Butin's (2010) taxonomy. Ironically, Christa's thoughts on the value of service-learning suggest an understanding that is closer to a

technical service-learning approach: "It really gets you to think and explore different ideas and different ways to interact. It makes you participate in stuff, rather than just going to class and doing whatever paper and turn it in and that's it." These comments reflect the fact that the class did not do any readings or study on service-learning itself prior to beginning that work. The project was framed initially by Carla as "helping the South community," and that is what the students tried to do. This lack of service-learning curriculum can be traced back further to the lack of curriculum in faculty development as well. The only training on service-learning offered to learning community faculty was the mention of service-learning in articles on learning communities (Jackson et al, 2013; Jedele, 2010; Laanan et al, 2013; Lardner & Malnarich, 2009) and my fifteen-minute presentation on critical service-learning. Not only students, but faculty leading service-learning projects, need a greater understanding of what it means to do service-learning.

Was this project service-learning then? Maybe not.

5.3 Relational Outcomes

Still there were outcomes, and some of them potentially beneficial to students and the campus. These relational outcomes may be more related to the learning community component of the courses than the class project, but the project was certainly a factor for the students as well.

5.3.1 Relationship Development

Collaboration and developing relationships with classmates and teachers are important components of service-learning and learning communities, and indeed a theme of relationships emerges from the stories told by students. Christa focused more on relationships formed with classmates, although Tim mentioned that as well. About the

service-learning project, Christa said, "it seemed like a cool project for all of us to do and collaborate in." Tim talked about knowing the other students more than he knows students in other classes: "I feel like because I have two classes with them jointly you get to know them better." For Tara and Lenora, this was probably the most important aspect of the class as well. In her post-event interview, Lenora exuberantly said: "It really gave me a family. You've seen in class the way we interact. We're basically a family. Those people, those few friends that I have, they're really my friends, and I'm probably going to keep them for the rest of my life."

The students often talked about knowing these particular professors better than their other professors as well. Tim mentioned knowing his professors better (knowing their names) in these classes. Lenora described being out for two weeks with the flu and the way her learning community teachers had reached out to make sure she had a plan for getting back on track, a story she concluded by noting: "And they believe in me. And that helps a lot." Vera, for whom developing relationships seemed more difficult, noted: "I don't want to classify myself as like a loner or anything, but meeting people and knowing they're in that class with me makes it easier."

Development of these kinds of relationships between students and between students and teachers is particularly important at two-year schools, which are commuter campuses and often struggle to help students find connection with their programs and academic lives.

5.3.2 Student Engagement

Closely related to relationship development, student engagement with coursework matters at two-year colleges. Some of the students mentioned feeling more engaged with

the classes, as Tara did in her overall analysis of the event and how the project and work with her colleagues made her more interested in these courses. Lenora similarly felt that the courses were more engaging because of the work on the project and the collaboration with her peers. She noted in her follow-up interview: "Other classes are easy, but this was one that I really wanted to engage in." These stories of student engagement, while not evidence of service-learning do suggest that learning communities offer opportunities for two-college students to connect with each other and the campus, which, especially from an institutional perspective, is a key idea.

On the other hand, though, these stories of engagement with the course are not as apparent in many of the students' stories. Mackenzie, who was the only non-traditional student I interviewed, said, "I can see a lot of people have made friends in there" when I asked her about relationships in the class. She, however, did feel engaged in the class and said that she loved to write. Christa also was not sold on the relationships developed in the class and had a negative impression of the situation by the time of her subsequent interview (she had already failed the English course at this time). Without the valuing of their backgrounds and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992) that a critical framework would offer students like Christa and Mackenzie, even engagement in the course is not an outcome of the learning community model then.

Engagement with the course, then, may have been more contingent on other factors, like perceived writing ability and self-identification as a college student, than on the class project. These factors do not stem from pedagogical choices in the classroom or institutional stances toward students, meaning that students likely to be privileged and to feel more engaged with the course and the campus are the students who were already

centered before the class even began. That is why hooks (1994) begins *Teaching to Transgress* with the assertion that "any radical pedagogy must insist that everyone's presence is acknowledged" (p. 8) and "the professor must genuinely *value* everyone's presence" (p. 8). She further clarifies why such beliefs matter in her discussion of social class in the classroom: "Bourgeois values in the classroom create a barrier, blocking the possibility of confrontation and conflict, warding off dissent. Students are often silenced by means of their acceptance of class values that teach them to maintain order at all costs" (hooks, 1994, p. 179). A classroom without any plan or urgency to address class, race, and power structures then privileges students who are already privileged and cannot hope to be liberatory. This is why a critical perspective is so crucial if we as educators aspire to liberatory education for all students. C.H. Knoblauch (1988) points it out clearly in his discussion of the relationship between teachers' ideologies and practices:

> Many teachers, besieged by the complexities of classroom life, wish to reject the uncomfortable oppositions of dialectic, such as those I have been sketching, by imagining they can have the best of everything, can affirm everything while denying nothing, as though the repudiating of distinctions could be a practical response to uncertainty. The trouble with such a tactic is that it simultaneously extinguishes dialogue and reasoned commitment by homogenizing the ideas that enable both talk and action. (p. 15)

They cannot, however, have it both ways. No choice of ideology is a choice of ideology, and no conscious choice in philosophy will only result in the perpetuation of institutional, structural values, including those values that oppress already marginalized students.

5.4 Transformation and Agency

If what happened in the classroom was not really service-learning, how should we think about agency and the possibilities for agency in this classroom? The stories told by students reveal many interesting ideas, despite the context of a traditional classroom and pedagogies.

Christa's observations about "required" service-learning tie in with my third research question about the opportunities for transformation that come with service-learning. She said, "Because community service, I feel like you should want to go out and help your community. I don't think that helping communities should be a punishment. Like you know an option besides jail is community service. It's not really an option if you're being forced to do it." She immediately connected the idea of community service with a prison sentence; this is an interesting parallel with school because the successful completion of a course requires the completion of activities, including service-learning activities in the learning community courses she participated in. Christa developed an idea about people being able to choose to participate in community service; she compared it with community service being assigned as a punishment in the criminal justice system. Christa noted that she felt community service is "something people should want to do." When I probed deeper about that statement, the "should" became more important, since she clearly noticed times when that was not the case. That requisite nature of service-learning or community service in Christa's observations is an important reminder that critical service-learning is only possible when student-participants are actors with the same agency in the process as teachers and community partners. Shor (1980) calls this the "transfer of initiative" (p. 103), when teachers and students both "mutually evolve"

(p. 103) the content of the course. Christa, as someone who felt like an outsider to the power structures of the classroom throughout the semester, perhaps unconsciously understood that this classroom operated under the same restrictions as other classrooms and that service-learning in this context was more aligned with prison sentences than education.

5.4.1 Small Stories in the Figured World of School

Both Tim and Christa frame their histories and current selves as on an upward trajectory; Tim, in particular, talks about past struggles but plans for future successes. Although he talked about not completing the first paper in the course he says, "But the second paper, I've liked working on it, so hopefully it will turn out great." These moves tie in with the way we learn to tell stories, and it is interesting to see the trend replicated in these micro-moments of students' narratives. Christa's stories are generally framed less positively, with her Girl Scout story beginning with the note that she didn't "finish" Girl Scouts and concluding with disliking camping trips. Her stories with an upward trajectory are more qualified: "I think that I am writing better." When I asked her what school would look like for her if she could make things the way she wanted them, she said "Maintaining all As while getting 35 a week at work." She tells me another story about herself and procrastination: "Any chance I get I distract myself. I hate it. If I could just focus. I have friends who never wait until the last minute to do things. I envy it. They never procrastinate. I wait until the last week to do it."

The types of stories students tell about themselves and their experiences as students are important ways of understanding the participants' identities as students in the class and the degree to which they had a sense of agency in the work that they did there.

Their willingness to frame their stories and experience as building toward positivity is particularly interesting. These kinds of stories are generally expected of students in schools; we encourage students to tell stories about growth, from test scores and grades to interpersonal development. Christa and Tim's interest in telling such stories about themselves may speak to the ways in which they have adopted some of the languages of school, even if they have not navigated school systems entirely successfully.

These examples evince the relationality that De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012) describe as a component of the "small stories" that participants tell (p. 161). These stories also suggest the ways in which they each engage with narratives of school. Tim's hopeful upward trajectory and Christa's version of a student who gets all As and does not procrastinate are their understandings of what it is to be a good student.

Holland et al. (1998) describe the ways in which participants in Alcoholics Anonymous learn to tell AA stories and how those stories are related to identity development: "The personal story is a vehicle for identity formation" (p. 71). They furthermore point out the ways in which such storytelling is the active construction of identity (Holland et al, 1998, p. 72). Tim tells a story about not being able to complete his first essay but confident that he will complete the second one. Although he was not able to finish the course with a passing grade, his willingness to construct this kind of self-identity is important. I wonder what would have happened if he had had more opportunities for reflection and meta-awareness of that identity of Tim-as-student. Christa's stories also suggest her understanding of the figured world of school. Holland et al. (1998) use figured worlds as a way of understanding the flexibility of social worlds: "Figured worlds rest upon people's abilities to form and be formed in collectively

realized 'as if' realms" (p. 49). In Christa's stories, she understands that success in school is about grades, and she imagines the kind of student capable of being successful, one who does not procrastinate, one who is not her. For Christa, one could imagine a critical classroom that could help her imagine the choices, the improvisations, as Holland et al (1998) would have it, that are possible for her.

These small stories from Christa and Tim suggest that opportunities for reflection and self-exploration of identity would have been more available to them through a process of critical reflection or reflection at all.

5.4.2 Opportunities for Critical Reflection

Without the cycles of reflection that could help students see their growth and momentum in doing service-learning, there is even less opportunity for students to experience moments of transformation in such activities. Reflection is a crucial component of both service-learning and critical service-learning (see Figure 2); Mitchell's (2008) differentiation of the difference between these types of service-learning takes reflection as a given, as does Butin's (2010) discussion of different purposes for service-learning. To go back a bit further in the literature on service-learning, Kahne and Westheimer (1996) analyze reflection, which is a component of almost all service-learning, and discuss the benefits and pitfalls of the practice. They point out that reflection can easily result in the calcification of stereotypes and previously held beliefs; Kahne and Westheimer (1996) contend that in order to create a transformative educational experience, critical reflection is necessary: "To be critical thinkers, students must be able to consider arguments that justify conclusions that conflict with their own predispositions and self-interest" (p. 598).

Reflection is a core element in service-learning because it is how participants process their experiences. In her chapter "Service Learning in the Classroom: Practical Issues," Pardo (1997), who founded a service-learning program at a predominantly White, middle-class school in New York, describes the effects of that program. She documents this reflection from an eighth-grade student who participated in the service-learning program and then wrote a letter to the Board of Education:

> You wouldn't begin to imagine, unless you were there for yourself, exactly what goes on. We make an incredible difference in their lives and they affect ours so much. While we are visiting them we light up their lives and put meaning into their glum days. When we leave we wonder and worry about them and they are always thinking about us. Sometimes you get so close to the person you work with that it's hard to let go… I still write and visit those friends I have made through Community Service… Without Community Service many of the people we help would have nothing. Sometimes we are the only friends or family they have. I just want to say thanks." (Pardo, 1997, p. 104)

An examination of this participant's words reveals a "salvation" narrative in which the objects of the community service are described as having "nothing" without the intervention of the community service students, the subjects of this activity. Ward (1997), in examining service learning in college curricula, observes that

> This "I give/they receive" orientation to the helping relationship often betrays a "better than/less than" dynamic that impedes the development of real caring relationships in which mutual expectations, responsibilities, and benefits are shared by both those who help and those being helped. No doubt students' self-

esteem soars when they feel needed and valued, but it is worrisome that they may

be gaining a sense of superiority through the process of making incorrect or

inappropriate assumptions about social groups and the nature of the help

provided. (p. 144)

Ogden (1999) probes the power dynamics of service-learning as well:

Implicit in the concept of service is an element of hierarchy. As an action, service

responds to a perceived imbalance. It is need-oriented. As a relationship, service

manifests itself as an exchange between the server and the served. In the scope of

this exchange, there is a distinction between the one who provides and the one

who receives, between the one who has and the one who does not have. Given

this subtle articulation of power, the manner in which the exchange takes place

can be a delicate matter. When gone awry, the act of service can take on an air of

loftiness that perpetuates rather than rights imbalance. (p. 190)

The identification of these salvation narratives and the stances those of us who participate

in service-learning are only possible to analyze and identify through the process of

reflection; without it, the calcified notions apparent in Pardo's (1997) narrative and

suggested by Kahne and Westheimer (1996) go unacknowledged and unchallenged.

Reflection is the first step.

In service-learning projects where critical reflection is happening, the experience

can be transformative for participants. In their chapter "Promoting Identity Development:

Ten Ideas for School-Based Service-Learning Programs," Yates and Youniss (1999)

provide examples of reflections from students engaged in service learning at a

predominantly Black, middle and lower class school in a major Northeastern city. This

parochial school's involvement in service learning comes from a charity orientation with

a significant focus on giving. Yates and Youniss (1999) document this student's

reflection:

> There was a man [at the soup kitchen]. I didn't catch his name but he had an
>
> obvious mental problem, and my classmates and I laughed at him for a few
>
> minutes. Then I realized that he was going to be like that forever. There was no
>
> one to help him and probably no one who cared. It hurt to realize that I was sitting
>
> among society's forgotten. The people I read about every day at school and in the
>
> newspapers. I wanted to cry, but I didn't, I couldn't, they didn't need my pity.
>
> They needed my action. (p. 52)

This project and the nature of the reflection differed tremendously from the project and

the type of reflection completed in Pardo's (1997) article. The movement possible in this

second example is only possible when reflection is happening at all. Delpit (1995) points

to the type of listening and engagement that yields this type of critical reflection: "…we

must learn to be vulnerable enough to allow our world to turn upside down in order to

allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness" (p. 47). Service-

learning that encourages students to engage in this kind of vulnerability will look quite

different from service-learning meant to calcify a current belief system; some kind of

reflection is necessary, however, for any kind of development or self-awareness to

happen. Or, as Freire (1998) would have it: "Education does not make us educable. It is

our awareness of being unfinished that makes us educable" (p. 58). Reflection is an act of

acknowledgment of that unfinished quality.

5.5 Looking Forward, Always Hopeful

Freire (1998) also writes: "Hope is something shared between teachers and students. The hope that we can learn together, produce something together, and resist together the obstacles that prevent the flowering of our joy" (p. 69). What pedagogical and ideological implications come from these stories and this research?

5.5.1 Critical Pedagogy and Critical Service-Learning

The implications for this research include the expansion of critical service-learning in higher education and particularly among marginalized students. Initially service-learning was conceived as a pedagogy for middle-class and upper-class students intended to improve their "citizenship" and attitudes toward service. Critical service-learning reframes service-learning even for those kinds of students, but the opportunities for traditionally marginalized students are even more significant. Critical service-learning offers students the opportunity to forget real relationships within and without school communities. Those networks are of crucial importance to students who may be on the fringes of higher education already.

This research suggests the benefits of critical service-learning for two-year college students and perhaps other traditionally marginalized students, but there are many additional avenues for research. Future studies should also address the relationships between students and community partners and the ways in which service-learning connects to school and curricular learning.

In chapter two, I referenced Austin Walker's (2018) metaphor likening social justice work to handing out helmets to marginalized folks who are banging their heads against oppressive forces. It is disheartening to think that we are only giving out helmets

instead of making headway against systemic oppression; on the other hand, though, we really need to give out those helmets. My study suggests that without even rudimentary attention to social justice and privilege in the classroom, not only is oppression unaddressed, but marginalized students continue to be harmed. When teachers find the tools and strategies to talk about race, gender, class, sexual orientation, matrices of oppression, and privilege in the classroom, maybe some of the harm can be mitigated.

5.5.2 Faculty Development

One important implication of this study is that without appropriate faculty development, critical service-learning, or service-learning of any kind, is unlikely to be successful. The faculty who led this learning community had minimal exposure to literature or information about the philosophy or logistics of service-learning, even though they were asked to implement service-learning as a requirement of the learning community. It is clear from my study that the teachers did not see service-learning as an integral element of the classroom, but as an extra piece, an additional component required for the learning community. Students did not read anything or receive any instruction about what service-learning is before being asked to develop an idea for doing service-learning, and the service-learning reflection ended up literally being an "extra" assignment at the end of the semester.

The teachers and likely all of the other learning community teachers as well needed a clearer sense of how critical service-learning is a framework of the course, necessitating conversations and structural changes from the beginning of the course, not just in the planning and implementation of a single class project.

Furthermore, critical service-learning results not just in service-learning but in actual structural change in who leads and has authority in the classroom. These shifts in power impact the composition process as much as the development of service-learning. hooks (1994) describes how not just students but also teachers must be vulnerable in the classroom and how the classroom must be a place that teachers should expect to grow in the same ways that students expect to grow in the classroom (p. 21). Shor (1980) shares his classroom practice of saying only his name and the title of the course on the first day and then inviting students to come to the board and share their names and experiences even on the first day; his practices demonstrate how critical classrooms disseminate power, not just in narrow circumstances, but in the landscape of the class as a whole.

Further research must be done to understand what teachers need in order to be able to do critical teaching generally and critical service-learning in particular. This work might include talking to teachers to understand the conflicting ideologies (institutional, personal) that motivate them as well as the use of Coffey's (2018) Critical Service-Learning Observation Protocol as a tool for helping teachers, researchers, and public intellectuals understand the practices and habits of mind that underlie critical service-learning.

There is also space for further scrutiny of the process of faculty development in post-secondary settings. The one learning community workshop at the start of the process suggests a banking education model for faculty development; teachers would likely have benefitted for an integrated, ongoing model of faculty development.

5.6 Finally

This study has explored service-learning at a two-year college through the stories and voices of student participants. Classroom observations have revealed that neither service-learning or critical service-learning were implemented, despite the intentions of faculty and the institution. Critical service-learning, in particular, offers possibilities for increased educational equity for students traditionally marginalized in higher education. More opportunities for faculty development on this topic, plus more research on faculty understandings of service-learning and critical service-learning, are required moving forward.

Despite my conclusion that service-learning was not really the outcome of this project, there were micro-moments of transformation in the course of the semester. Though there is little evidence of critical consciousness in the Marxist tradition, there were moments of Holland et al.'s (1992) improvisation, when people moved out their default settings. Carla shifted from lecturing to transcribing student ideas on the white board. Christa connected her thinking to the ways school operate. Students in the class made meaningful connections with each other and with their professors. These moments do not reflect sweeping social change or even orientation toward social change. They do suggest, though, that shifting our default settings as students and teachers offers a modicum of agency, which is, if nothing else, a start.

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APPENDIX: CRITICAL SERVICE-LEARNING OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
(COFFEY, 2018)

Observation Protocol Operationalized Terms

Observable Characteristic	Present	Not Present
Curriculum: Classroom Activities/Discussions/Lessons: These components are present in the actual interactions in the classroom.		
Injustice might also be transposed with inequity/unfairness/injustice/discrimination/bias/prejudice		
Reframing requires the teacher or student to imagine themselves from another perspective		
Questioning the distribution of power would include having students to think about how the world would look if there was an equal distribution of money and resources		
Clarifying privilege might include activities like the privilege walk and poverty simulation, classroom discussions about how people are born with certain privileges		
Developing authentic relationships among students faculty and partners: The teachers and students both exhibit comfort with each other in the discussion of difficult topics like race, poverty, sexuality.		
Challenging assumptions might be demonstrated with students and teachers asking the question, "Why do you believe this?" or offering a counter-perspective		
Focusing on social justice issues that are personal to the group. There are a variety of these, but most commonly: poverty, race, color, language, sexuality, orientation, gender, trafficking, DACA, religious freedom		
Posing questions that might challenge students' understanding of their experience and understanding of the world		
Analyzing texts (informative and literary) for social issues		
Points out power structures/hierarchies		
Confronting assumptions and stereotypes		
Accepting privilege: Admitting that maybe sometimes privilege is a part of circumstance and that some people benefit from circumstances they had no control over (i.e. skin color, income of parents).		
Notes:		
Space: What does the space of the classroom look like? What are the classroom dynamics?		

Mutuality (Teacher as learner and learner as teacher)		
Trust (The teacher has established an environment where it is obvious students feel comfortable challenging their assumptions and speaking openly about difficult topics. Students share personal information and thoughts even in the presence of an observer. Everyone feels "safe".)		
Respect (Regardless of differences of opinion, students spe		
Acknowledgement of difference		
Opportunity for disequilibrium/discomfort?		
Safe environment with respect		
Mutual understanding of goals. (Within lessons and activities, the students appear to understand what is expected of them and the teacher looks to the students to help develop goals.)		
Notes:		
Pedagogy: The planning and preparation of the activities, lessons, and space.		
Evidence of reciprocal learning about difference and similarity (Thea teacher and students learn about students' culture and experience.		
How does the instructor demonstrate an understanding of student experience/background?		
Notes:		
What activities has the professor/instructor created to learn more about student experience/background?		
Notes:		
In what ways does the instructor engage students in reflection?		
Notes:		
What texts/experiences/opportunities spark a reflection on identity development?		
Notes:		

Evidence that the teacher embraces the "progressive and liberal agenda" that undergirds critical service-learning practice (Butin, 2006).		
Notes:		
How does the instructor attempt to raise critical consciousness?		
Notes:		
How are students, faculty and community members essential parts of formal and informal meetings?		
Notes:		
What opportunities for dialogue, reflections, and writing assignments encourage analysis of real world concerns and push students to consider the systemic causes?		
Notes:		
What evidence exists that the instructor provides opportunities for students to explore community around the school/university?		
Notes:		
Inclusion of presentations/co-teaching by community members/parents/stakeholders		
Careful language that does not promote deficit thinking.		
Notes:		