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“We Are...”: Creating Discursive Spaces  
for the Construction of *Counter* Narratives  
through Photovoice as Critical Service Learning

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in  
Education, Curriculum, Culture, and Change, at Virginia Commonwealth University.

By

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Richmond, Virginia  
April 2018

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Hilda Davis Smith. She taught me what it means to be a strong woman – to love deeply, work hard, fight for what’s right, and never forget your way back home. She was my support, my strength, and my encouragement through every trial and joy. She was the epitome of an “Appalachian Woman” – feisty, determined, and passionate, with a fierce love of family that came before all else. Her memory has guided me through this journey and will continue to inspire me to be better and do more. It is because of her...that I am.

With love always to the first in a long line of strong women, may I continue your legacy....

**May we know them, May we be them, May we raise them.  
(May we teach them and learn from them)**



**My grandmother, Hilda Davis Smith (L)  
and great-grandmother, Mildred Osborne Davis (R)**

## Acknowledgement

Throughout the journey that has brought me to this point, there have been many twists and turns, cliff hangers, doors shut, and others opened, moments when I thought I was on top of the world and those that brought me to my knees....yet through it all, every step of the way, there has been my mama, Rhonda Smith Hayes. She's been my rock, my tears and my laughter, and most importantly, my heart. To say she is the most compassionate and selfless person I know is an understatement...it is because of her that I am able to love, to teach, to learn, and to grow. So first, I want to thank her for everything she has given me, taught me, and shared with me! The struggles were bearable and the joys were that much sweeter because of her unconditional love and support.

I would also like to thank my daddy, Carter Hall, for always believing that I could do whatever I wanted, for pushing me to strive for greater goals, for never giving up on me, and for encouraging whatever crazy path I chose to take. Also, special thanks to my step-dad, Scott Hayes, for loving me and believing in me, for encouraging me to keep going when the mountain was steep and celebrating with me when the sun was shining. Strong men teach us to know our worth, respect ourselves, and settle for nothing short of loving kindness and these two men are no exception.

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Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my tribe. My family, friends, mentors, and colleagues that have stood by me, believed in me, and never let me forget my passion or my

worth. This is a long and often lonely journey, but your laughter, kindness, and genuine goodness got me to the finish line and continues to inspire me daily. Lots of love and gratitude to each one of you (hopefully you know who you are!). Also a shout out to Sweet Sabine, my fur baby that was with me from the beginning and made it until the end...her floppy ears, hound dog eyes, and sweet snuggles made every day better than ok. [Adopt a senior dog...they are the best!]

Every person we meet along our journey plays some role in who we were, who we are, and who we will become. Every person, friend or foe, has shaped me in some way and this accomplishment would not have been possible without these myriad interactions. So, however great or small, I owe thanks for the lessons learned and the experiences shared!

As a first generation college student from the heart of Appalachia, I understand. So, to all the kids that aren't sure where they are going or how they'll get there, but are determined to keep putting one foot in front of the other come hell or high water....this one's for you!

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## Abstract

### “WE ARE...”: CREATING DISCURSIVE SPACES FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF *COUNTER* NARRATIVES THROUGH PHOTOVOICE AS CRITICAL SERVICE LEARNING

By Amanda F. Hall, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Education, Curriculum, Culture, and Change, at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018.

Director: Kurt Stemhagen, PhD, Associate Professor, School of Education

Broader social issues that affect students’ lives manifest in the classroom and the current neo-liberal reform structures in education (e.g., the accountability movement combined with punitive discipline measures and structural classism/racism) fail to acknowledge the impact of these issues on student identity within school and community. While this era of standardized testing has brought about anti-democratic realities in schools of all sorts, it is also the case that schools that pass tests often enjoy a more liberatory climate while schools struggling to meet testing requirements are more likely to possess oppressive qualities. Not coincidentally, the more oppressive schools are often populated by poor kids, kids of color, and very often in urban schools, poor kids of color. Deficit thinking runs rampant in urban schools and marginalized communities – student experiences perpetuate oppressive social hierarchies and students are pushed to think that they can’t, won’t, and aren’t capable. Critical service learning, and more specifically photovoice as a form of critical service learning, has promise to provide a different kind of educational experience.

This project is an exploratory qualitative study using photovoice, photo elicitation, and critical thematic analysis to determine what narratives students construct while participating in photovoice as a form of critical service learning. This study posits a way to move from deficits to possibilities by providing a space for traditionally marginalized youth to legitimize their sense of place, identity, and connection to their community while empowering them to be advocates for social change. Students served as action researchers, constructing counter narratives through an adaptation of photovoice documentation, addressing social inequities by highlighting strengths and assets in their own schools and community. In addition to using photovoice as a methodology, this study also addressed how photovoice as critical service learning pedagogy can serve to create discursive spaces for those counter-narratives to circulate and to be heard. This project addressed the need for a critical service learning approach in education that empowers students to become agents of change, using their own stories and cultural/social capital to disrupt deficit perspectives while promoting possibility perspectives – moving us closer to a more democratic public education.

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

I became involved in an urban community nearly a decade ago, first, as a middle school teacher and most recently as the facilitator of several school and community critical service-learning projects. As a classroom teacher, I saw firsthand the pernicious effects of deficit model thinking in action, the view that the cultural capital of poor students, students of color, and students outside the *norm* are somehow less valid, therefore less valued, in schools and society, and must be *fixed* in order for positive learning and action to occur (Kohn, 2004; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Noguera, 2003, 2009, & 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010, Valencia, 2010; Paris, 2012). These effects were visible in the climate and culture of the school as well as the community. My students were accustomed to being on the “receiving” end – others coming into their schools and communities and telling them what they needed – providing the handout with little to no interest in the story, their story. Early on, I began to offer students opportunities to give back to their community in ways that were meaningful to them by utilizing student voice. The results were visibly empowering. When students were empowered to tell their story, to relate the needs of their community to their own passions and skills, transformation occurred. Students who were slow to speak up and often appeared unengaged (at best) and angry and defiant (at worst) began to take action and represent the assets of their school and community. Not only were the *students* more active in their community and more engaged in their academics, *I* also became transformed. Through collective action, I became a part of this community as opposed to someone who came in to

teach and then left. I began to engage with students, families, and community members on a deeper level, advocating as an *insider*. Trust, respect, and genuine collaboration began to occur. Experiencing this transformation *with* my students changed my view of the world...I became more aware of structural forces that limit democratic action in schools and communities, I became more aware of my own internal biases, and most importantly, I became aware of the reality that meritocracy does not exist when there are no spaces for silenced voices to be heard or counter-narratives to circulate.

Broader social issues that affect students' lives are not left at the bus stop. They manifest in the classroom and the current neo-liberal reform structures in education (e.g., the accountability movement combined with structural classism and racism) fail to acknowledge the impact of these issues on student identity within school and community (Yosso, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2007; Lipman, 2013). While this era of standardized testing has brought about anti-democratic realities in schools of all sorts it is also the case that schools that pass tests often enjoy a more nearly liberatory climate while schools struggling to meet testing requirements are more likely to possess oppressive qualities (Valenzuela, 2005; Tanner, 2013). Not coincidentally, the more oppressive schools are often populated by poor kids, kids of color, and very often in urban schools, poor kids of color (Noguera, 2003; Kohn, 2004; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Noguera, 2009 & 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Valencia, 2010; Paris, 2012).

Educational structures designed to merely transmit and conserve society and culture do not allow for the creation of spaces for alternatives and counter-narratives to circulate. These structures often keep communities isolated from schools and both teacher and student identity of self and place suffer (Apple, 2005). Deficit thinking runs rampant in urban schools and

marginalized<sup>1</sup> communities – student experiences perpetuate oppressive social hierarchies and students are pushed to think that they can't, won't, and aren't capable (Valencia, 2010; Boutte, 2012; Yosso, 2005; Ford, Harris, Tyson, and Trotman, 2001). Critical service learning, and more specifically photovoice as a form of critical service learning, has promise to provide a different kind of educational experience, a liberatory one. Maxine Greene (1988) describes just such an education:

making more and more connections in their own experience, reflecting on their shared lives, taking heed of the consequences of the actions they performed, they would become aware of more and more alternatives, more and more experiential possibilities; and this meant an increased likelihood of achieving freedom. (pg. 42-43)

The current structures (and strictures) in education serve to separate and exclude, label and define, creating ever widening disparities in achievement based on race, class, gender, and ability (American Psychological Association, 2012). This is seen most profoundly in marginalized communities and it is often internalized and perpetuated by both students and teachers (Garcia and Guerra, 2004). Outsiders believe they can't, their teachers believe they can't, and they (students) begin to believe they can't (Scheurich & Laible, 1995; Valencia, 1997; Yosso, 2005; Paris, 2012; Simone, 2012). This has profound implications beyond academic achievement. For a number of social, political, and economic reasons, marginalized students often believe they are less than and that they do not have the power or ability to achieve academically, let alone to solve the world's, or their own community's, problems. Unfortunately, the social and cultural capital of *others* is not often valued in the current educational models as this deficit thinking approach assumes that marginalized students and families are the ones at fault for failure (Yosso,

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by van den Hoonaard (2008) and described in more detail in Chapter 3

2005). This assumption leads to beliefs that marginalized students enter school without adequate knowledge and skills and parents of said students just don't value education because "educators most often assume that schools work and that students, parents, and community need to change to conform to this already effective and equitable system" (Yosso, 2005, p. 75; Perez, 2009). Given the democratic and civic purposes of public schools, it stands to reason that schools should not perpetuate the learned powerlessness endemic to other social institutions. This project is designed to contend with some of the problems described above and to help cultivate voice for the silenced and balance existing power differentials that lead to deficit thinking.

### **Overview and Rationale**

Through this project, I explore the use of photovoice as a form of critical service learning for traditionally marginalized youth to legitimize their sense of place, identity, and connection to their community while empowering them to be advocates for social change. Students served as action researchers, constructing counter narratives through photovoice documentation to address social inequities by highlighting assets in their own schools and community. It is important to note here that traditionally, photovoice methodology is used as a way to bring to light inequities and injustices yet an adapted use of photovoice in this study emphasized assets as a way to move beyond deficit thinking – from thinking about what's wrong to thinking about what's right. In addition to using photovoice as a methodology, this study also addressed how photovoice as critical service learning pedagogy can serve to create discursive spaces for those counter-narratives to circulate and to be heard. This project addressed the need for a critical service learning approach in education that moves beyond "learning by doing" and empowers students to become agents of change, using their own stories and cultural/social capital to dispel the deficit-model perspectives often surrounding marginalized students and communities.

Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) argue that mainstream media often serves to portray youth, and primarily youth of color, as criminals, drug addicts, nuisances to society and with these images flooding society minute by minute: “many adults think of young people as problems, and young people accept adult images of their deficiencies rather than viewing themselves as agents of change” (p. 2). They also argue that researchers “reinforce this view with studies of poverty, racism, and other forces that cause poor housing, broken families, and worsening social conditions”, seeking “to save, protect, and defend them from conditions that affect them” (p. 3). When youth are viewed as victims of society, it serves to de-emphasizes their assets and strengths and weakens their ability to help themselves and their communities, perpetuating the cycle of deficit thinking. Checkoway and Gutierrez (2006) go on to state that there is an emerging alternative, Youth Participation. This alternative

portrays young people as competent citizens with a right to participate and a responsibility to serve their communities” and “proponents of this view want to build on the strengths of youth by enabling them to make a difference in ways that provide them with tangible benefits and develop healthier communities. Young people who view themselves as change agents, and adults who are their allies, are instrumental to this approach. (p. 3)

Critical service learning, and more specifically photovoice as critical service learning, is one such approach to youth participation for community change.

Service learning for social justice, also termed critical service learning, emerged in the late 1990’s as an alternative to traditional service learning models. Maybach (1996) has argued that traditional service learning historically placed the emphasis on student learning and outcomes related to student development of new ideas and perspectives in relation to meeting a

community need, whereas service learning for social justice provided a new means to move beyond just “volunteering” and was “designed to enhance practice through exploration of issues of oppression, individual voice, [and] empowerment” (p. 224). This alternative approach took the initial tenants of service learning and added an additional layer – a “service ethic”.

Previous research into the benefits and limitations of service learning had offered critiques of the traditional model stressing the need for a pluralistic approach that more accurately reflected not just the *need* of a particular group but also the root causes of that need. In the early years of service learning research, outcomes showed a high degree of *charity* modeling in which students were the providers and marginalized communities were the recipients. The charity model promoted a hegemonic system of service and learning that reinforced a one-sided view of *for the common good*, perpetuating the structures that identify the *needy* as the oppressed and the service providers the oppressors, whether they were aware of this oppression or not (Maybach, 1996 and Mitchell, 2008).

Artz (2001) employs a synthesis of Gramsci’s theoretical concept of hegemony with Freire’s philosophy of critical pedagogy to support the use of critical service learning to address social problems. Gramsci’s cultural hegemony theory posits, “man is not ruled by force alone, but by ideas” and his faith in the “estimation of the power, both creative and conservative, of ideas” (Bates, 1975, p. 351). In Freire’s critical pedagogy, individualism is a “particular expression of a social consciousness” and through critical thought and action “it is impossible to deny the constitutive power of their consciousness in the social practice in which they participate (Freire and Macedo, 2008, p. 355). Artz argues that a serious limitation to traditional service learning pedagogy is the “service learning as charity” model often employed in higher education (and often reproduced in the K-12 SL model), a model that provides students with opportunities

to identify community needs, serve as a way to address the needs, yet fails to provide outlets for reflection and consideration of the structural forces that perpetuate the injustices. It also often fails to provide opportunities to meaningfully reflect *with* the community as to why the injustice occurs and how their own (the student's) individual biases may serve as limitations to social justice.

The basis for Artz's (2001) argument is that "charity, by itself, as a basis for service learning, will not likely lead to a sustained social critique or action" (p. 240). He notes, "charity frequently denies the possibility of social change by implying that the poor or oppressed are less competent and less able than those who have more social, cultural, and economic capital" (p. 240). Artz (2001) stresses the need to move beyond a service learning pedagogy that fails to challenge structural forces and allows for a discourse that promotes mutually inclusive dialogue between service learning students and the *oppressed* in order to promote social action, not charity. Mitchell (2008) makes a similar claim, surmising that the goal of *critical* service learning, as opposed to traditional service learning, is to deconstruct and dismantle power structures that perpetuate the need for service and serve to sustain social inequalities.

One secondary purpose of this project was to make the case that photo voice can be thought of as more than a valid qualitative methodology to explore critical service learning, but also as a form of critical service learning in itself. Regardless of whether that case was made completely in this project, it is evident that photovoice and critical service learning are linked in a number of ways, specifically the outcomes and benefits for marginalized youth. If this project failed to specifically make the case for photovoice as a form of critical service learning, the fact remains that it is, at the least, a suitable method for the study of critical service learning.

## **Research Questions**

As the literature review that follows shows, there is a significant gap in the knowledge/research base regarding the use of critical service learning for social transformation with urban youth in marginalized communities. Even fewer studies have investigated how photovoice, as a form of critical service learning, opens discursive spaces in which students can circulate different narratives about their own lives and communities.

In order to address these gaps and determine how critical service learning—and more particularly, photovoice as a form of critical service learning—serves as a platform for opening discursive spaces to construct and circulate counter-narratives, this study addressed the following research questions:

- What narratives do students construct about their identity, their community, and their sense of place within their community through participation in a photovoice critical service-learning project?
- What narratives do students construct about their ability to be change agents in their community through participation in a photovoice critical service-learning project?
- How, in particular, does photovoice as critical service learning contribute to the construction of student narratives about themselves and their community?

## **Design and Methods**

For this study, I employed an exploratory qualitative study using photovoice, photo elicitation, and critical thematic analysis. Photovoice can be defined as a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach that integrates photography and critical discussion to examine issues from the perspective of community member's varied lived experiences within a targeted context (Wang, 2003), in this case, the students living and going to school in a

marginalized, urban community. Photovoice, in the context of this study, involved giving urban youth cameras to document their own realities - the perceived assets and injustices within their community and school. I position photovoice as both a research method and as a form of critical service learning. The nature of photovoice, as well as how it was employed specifically in this project, will be described in detail in chapter three. In order to understand the ways in which I am using photovoice in my work within this particular community, it is valuable to first consider the ways in which service learning and community-engaged scholarship are thought. We also need to consider some of the underlying theoretical positions that support differing ways of thinking about the kinds of work that are relevant to this project.

## **Chapter Two**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework**

It is important to note that although there are many theories that may connect critical service learning, community-based participatory research, and photovoice (such as social contact theory, critical race theory, critical literacy theory, etc.), for the purpose and scope of this study, I elected to ground this work in critical theory as viewed through the lenses of Dewey's democratic education approach and Freire's critical consciousness approach. Usually, the work of Dewey and Freire are seen as two distinct philosophies of education, occasionally they are seen as companionable schools of thought, and often they are invoked as the foundation for those engaging in community service learning projects. Some may question why Dewey is included in a critical theory framework and scholars differ on this topic, but this study serves to highlight their commonalities. In agreement with Itin (1999), this connection highlights both Deweyan and Freirean thought as "concerned with increasing the capabilities (self-efficacy) of individuals to participate in the democratic process (political awareness and action)" (p. 93).

Dewey's conception of a democratic public features the necessity of many smaller publics possessing shared interests. Recent Deweyan scholarship has considered how Dewey's ideas make space for marginalized groups (Roberts, 2005; Stickers, 2010, Levinson, 2011). To Dewey, the efforts people in marginalized publics undertake to participate in broader social community spheres is one important source of dynamism that drives a democracy. Stenhagen (2016a) posits "the possibilities for Dewey's epistemology to serve critical ends [may lead to] an

epistemology that decenters the center, that necessitates participation from those historically pushed to the margins and one that requires that we see the ways in which this dynamic sort of public forming is at the heart of the democratic enterprise” (p. 73). Some of the other theories that are used to support critical thought in education and schooling, although applicable to this project, do not provide the same focus on the interrelationship of school and society (Levinson, 2011). Freire’s idea of critical consciousness assumes that the individual is able to address their current reality from an historical and social standpoint that leads to change (Freire, 1970) and he has argued that the use of photographic images can serve to inspire groups to collectively analyze their community’s social conditions, leading to collective action for change (Freire, 1973; Desyllas, 2010). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire states,

Every human being, no matter how ‘ignorant’ or submerged in the ‘culture of silence’ he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others. Provided with the proper tools for such encounter, he can gradually perceive his personal and social reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it. (p. 13)

In what follows, I take a slightly deeper look at the theoretical underpinnings of pragmatic thought and critical theory, focusing on their influences on critical service learning as both a process and a pedagogy. Although the tension between pragmatic and critical approaches found in the literature cannot be ignored (Stemhagen, 2016b) – the recognition that institutions position us and shape our consciousness in ways that we aren’t conscious of and we are less able to exert control of reshaping it than the more Freirean critical theorists assume – it is important to note that I am drawing more on the Freirean critical school of thought for this project as it emphasizes how social change might be possible. That said, one reason to draw on Dewey is the

recognition of this tension between the desire for students to develop their critical faculties and the importance of this project to serve as an opportunity for students to explore the world as they see fit. One way of negotiating this tension is to use Dewey to lead us toward a focus on student choice and agency within the context of this broader Freirean critical project. As Stemhagen (2016b) notes,

[Dewey] did not advocate teaching children explicitly about the need to or means of overturning unequal social structures, as this would entail substituting one set of externally imposed values (expressed in the sort of standard rigid notions of curriculum against which he railed) for another (the new revolutionary ones). Instead, Dewey envisioned an education that started with children's interests and focused on nurturing those interests in ways that would enhance access to and ability with the curriculum. Further, this process would foster children's recognition that newly acquired skills and knowledge equipped them to act on the world — and instilled a desire to do so. (p. 106-107)

This will hopefully allow for a reading of the critical service learning literature that provides a deeper understanding of how education and the structure of schooling can be used as a basis for civic engagement and possibility perspectives, especially within marginalized communities.

### **Pragmatist's Influence on Critical Service Learning**

Pragmatism is the belief that individual experience is only realized through transaction with others (Roberts, 2012) and is based upon the practical consequences of actions and heavily values context. James Kloppenburg, as quoted by Jay (2005) states, “[pragmatists believed that] meaning must be interpreted on the basis of lived experience and informed with an understanding of the reflected experience of life” (p. 271). There are no universal truths, only

*truths* within specific places at specific times. By combining these facets of Pragmatism into a whole, we see the emergence of a theoretical framework consistent with the objectives of experiential education. Perhaps the most influential figure to experiential education from the Pragmatic perspective is John Dewey. As Roberts (2012) notes, “To Dewey, democracy becomes lived through the interrelationships and interdependence of social relations bound together by experiences – both individual and collective” (p. 60). In *Experience and Education*, Dewey further insists on the “intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education” (Dewey, 1938, p. 20). In promotion of democratic schooling, Dewey states that “there is no substitute for the vitality and depth of close and direct intercourse and attachment...Democracy must begin at home, and its home is the neighborly community” (Dewey, 1954 as quoted in Harkavy and Hartley, 2010).

The influence of pragmatist thought on experiential education, “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (Association for Experiential Education, 2017), is seen in the emphasis of using the educative process to shape the social world and make a positive difference in society through democratic action. This notion is what allows experiential education, and therefore critical service learning, to more fully connect theory with practice and to move beyond learning by doing toward a learning *with* philosophy. Jay (2005) notes:

Beyond a mere political arrangement, democracy also has social and moral dimensions....to further this cause, Dewey argued, education for democracy was an absolute necessity. Such education must be based on experiential rather than book

learning, creative investigation rather than rote memory, and a transactional relationship between a child and environment rather than a passive, spectatorial one. (p. 296)

### **Critical Theorist's Influence on Critical Service Learning**

The critical theory approach is fairly new to the field of experiential education and one claim made with this project is that it has great potential to help us make our way through the current educational crisis. For critical theorists, experience is viewed through the lens of power, either as a tool for reproducing inequalities or as a means for emancipation (Reynolds, 1999). Critical theory places an emphasis on the distortion of experience by society (the world that you see is not the world that is) (Roberts, 2012). Contemporary critical theory is commonly thought to have its roots in the work of the Frankfurt School theorists, a group of philosophers and social critics organized to call attention to the oppression by political and social structures of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe and how this oppression could *hide in plain sight* through distortion of the collective consciousness, altering one's sense of experience. As Roberts (2012) states:

as the Frankfurt School theorists argued, Rousseau's hands-off approach to schooling and Dewey's faith in the democratic classroom would each still result in forms of false consciousness. The individual, on her own, could not be trusted to achieve critical sensibilities....Nor could the school, as currently organized, be trusted to educate for critical reasoning. (p. 75)

For experience and education to be truly linked in a way that is transparent, meaningful, and progressive, there must be critical reflection of the true nature of society. Critical theory, as a tenant of experiential education, "seeks to make ideologies, distortions, and hegemony overt and visible, and, in doing so, to suggest how we might imagine a world otherwise" (Roberts, 2012).

Critical theorist Paulo Freire's influence on the field of experiential education is immense (Deans, 1999; Itin, 1999; Breuning, 2005; Roberts, 2012). Freire's work is a joining of knowledge and power and is applied to experiential education as a way to use one's experience to gain knowledge that can be used to free the oppressed (and free themselves from the chains of societal oppression). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire discusses the "banking model" of education as a way to illuminate "how knowledge acquisition is tied to larger cultural processes" (Roberts, 2012) and how depositing information into a *vessel* limits, structures, and defines experience in such a way that the experience of education itself becomes oppressive. The alternative is to turn reflection into transformative experience. Freire (1970) notes:

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness.

Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (p. 51)

As viewed through the critical lens, experience, and therefore experiential education, has the potential to be oppressive *or* liberating...experience is already present, waiting for the student to deconstruct and reconstruct its meaning, to "write a new narrative of freedom and power" (Roberts, 2012).

### **From Service Learning to *Critical* Service Learning Pedagogy**

#### **Service Learning**

Within the field of experiential education, many methodologies connect experience and education. One such methodology is service learning. Kaye (2010) defines service learning as:

a research based teaching method where guided or classroom learning is applied through action that addresses an authentic community need in a process that allows for youth initiative and provides structured time for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of acquired skills and knowledge. (p. 9)

The historical roots of service learning can be traced back to Benjamin Franklin and his 1749 pamphlet describing the educational goals of the Academy of Philadelphia, outlined by Harkavy and Hartley (2010) as:

‘The idea of what is true merit, should also often be presented to youth, explain’d and impress’d on their minds, as consisting in an Inclination join’d with an Ability to serve mankind, one’s country, Friends and Family...which Ability should be the great aim and + End of all Learning’, followed closely (nearly a century later) by the commitment of American land-grant institutions to ‘not just educate students as farmers or mechanics, but as men, fitted by education and attainments for the greater usefulness and higher duties of citizenship.’ (p. 419)

The philosophical underpinnings of service learning are often attributed to John Dewey (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Jacoby, 1996; Saltmarsh, 1996; Hatcher, 1997; Morton & Saltmarsh, 1998; Deans, 1999). Dewey’s view of democratic education insisted on the “intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education” (Dewey, 1938). As Harkavy and Hartley (2010) note, Dewey “believed that the most powerful learning occurs when significant problems are examined, reflected, and acted upon in their rich, contextual complexity” (p. 419). These philosophical foundations were further solidified by Lewin’s (1983) *Field Theory of Learning* and later by Kolb’s (2014) *Experiential Learning Theory* with the emphasis on expanding knowledge by acting to solve real-world problems (Jacoby, 2014).

Jane Addams' (a contemporary and friend of Dewey in progressive era Chicago) Hull House, serving as the link between experiential education, service learning, and social justice, is an early manifestation of service learning, with Daynes and Longo (2004) noting,

Had Addams written "The Humanizing Tendency" in 1994 one would see in her remarks a creative but typical description of service-learning. But the date of her writing, 1904, and the location of the service-learning, Hull House, suggests that Addams' work was much more than a standard application of service-learning practice. It was, instead, pioneering work, the understanding of which should reframe thinking about the history and significance of service-learning. (p. 5)

They go on to state that "Jane Addams' work is a valuable reminder that service-learning may be understood not only as an educational technique, but also as an agile approach to learning whose greatest value is the unpredictable creativity that it brings to public life" (p. 6). This serves to embrace Dewey's democratic education approach while moving beyond the theoretical towards a more practical application.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century unfolded, the current manifestation of a *critical* service learning began to emerge, in part, due to the *radicals* of the late 1960s such as the Black Panther Party (Calderon, 2007). Through the turmoil of the late 1960's, there was a resurgence of, and call to action for, progressive education reforms, and Dewey's ideals of democratic education began to recirculate in education conversations (Greene, 2000). The term "service learning" was first used in 1966, as one such progressive educational ideal and later solidified as a methodology in the early 1990s, since morphing into what could be termed a *field* all its own (Calderon, 2007).

The use of service learning pedagogy is a solid strategy for providing educators, students, schools, and communities with meaningful connections and actions that are mutually beneficial

to all by reinforcing academic learning while meeting the needs of the broader community. An evaluation of past research by Billig (2000, 2002, and 2004) on service learning outcomes highlights the correlations between service learning and student/community empowerment as a way to transform the educational experiences of marginalized, diverse youth while also transforming the perceptions and biases of the community. During the late 1980's and early 1990's, in response to the growing demand for educational reform strategies to help improve student achievement objectives, educational researchers began to focus on an initiative termed *service-learning*. Service-learning addresses two perceived needs of K-12 schools: reforming youth and reforming education. Early educational data had shown that students were becoming increasingly alienated from their own communities and less focused on civic responsibility while test scores were shown to be declining, with US schools falling behind internationally. Service learning emerged as a new pedagogical alternative that connected student learning to community engagement in a real and meaningful way (Billig, 2000). This early research positively correlated high-quality service-learning programs with desirable student outcomes in "areas of personal-social development, academic achievement, citizenship, and career awareness" (Billig, 2002, p. 185). Although there have been increasing financial constraints and an increased focus on high-stakes standards testing during the last decade, research shows that service-learning has continued to become widespread within K-12 schools and the methodologies remain effective in producing positive student outcomes despite these challenges (Billig, 2004).

Several studies reinforce the notion that service learning pedagogy and culturally responsive professional development are easily merged to generate effective outcomes for academic achievement for marginalized youth and increased cultural awareness and acceptance by those that teach marginalized youth. A study by Martin (2006) found that youth currently

participating in, or young adults that have participated in, service-learning are stronger leaders and role models, are more politically and socially connected to their communities, place higher values on lifelong learning, are more culturally sensitive, have higher aspirations, and are generally more productive and more satisfied members of society. These outcomes indicate that youth that participate in service-learning will have a more successful transition into adulthood than those that do not. For marginalized youth, service learning provides an opportunity to acquire skills and develop potential that may not otherwise be recognized and/or nurtured due to cultural barriers. In a study conducted by Scales, Roehlkepartain, Kielsmeier, & Benson (2006) of the Search Institute, results suggest that participation in service learning positively effects the achievement gap between low and high-SES students and principals of urban, low SES, and majority nonwhite schools are significantly more likely to report that service-learning has a strong positive impact on attendance, academic achievement, and school engagement.

Results of a 2006 study conducted by Yamauchi showed that students participating in a service-learning program placed higher importance on contributions to community, felt they were more valued by community members, and were more responsible for the welfare of their communities than those not participating in the program. Teachers and community members also agreed that the service-learning program gave students a greater sense of inclusion in the community and awareness of their cultural heritage. The results were interpreted as a validation of sociocultural theory, stating that participants in service-learning display higher mental functioning because of increased social interaction, allowing them to identify with a broader community, attain a greater degree of cultural awareness, and a more collective sense of community responsibility (Yamauchi, 2006). Nelson & Eckstein (2008), conclude through their research that the implementation of a service-learning model for at-risk youth has proved

successful in promoting a *possibility* perspective (as opposed to a deficit perspective) among students, staff, and community members, leading to a more culturally inclusive learning environment and setting the stage for both individual student and community transformation.

### **Critical Service Learning**

Service learning for social justice, also termed critical service learning, emerged in the late 1990's as an alternative to traditional service learning models. Maybach (1996) argues that traditional service learning historically placed the emphasis on student learning and outcomes related to student development of new ideas and perspectives in relation to meeting a community need, whereas service learning for social justice provided a new means to move beyond just “volunteering” and was “designed to enhance practice through exploration of issues of oppression, individual voice, [and] empowerment” (p. 224). This alternative approach took the initial tenants of service learning and added an additional layer – a “service ethic”.

Previous research into the benefits and limitations of service learning had offered critiques of the traditional model stressing the need for a pluralistic approach that more accurately reflected not just the need of a particular group but also the root causes of that need. In the early years of service learning research, outcomes showed a high degree of *charity* modeling in which students were the providers and marginalized communities were the recipients. The charity model promoted a hegemonic system of service and learning that reinforced a one-sided view of *for the common good*, perpetuating the structures that identify the *needy* as the oppressed and the service providers the oppressors, whether they were aware of this oppression or not. Freire (1970) states:

In order to have the continued opportunity to express their “generosity,” the oppressors much perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the

permanent fount of this “generosity” which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. (p. 26)

Artz (2001), noting that through a synthesis of Gramsci’s cultural hegemony theory with Freire’s philosophy of critical pedagogy, one can ascertain the use of critical service learning to address social problems. Gramsci’s cultural hegemony theory posits, “man is not ruled by force alone, but by ideas” and his faith in the “estimation of the power, both creative and conservative, of ideas” (Bates, 1975, p. 351). In Freire’s critical pedagogy, individualism is a “particular expression of a social consciousness” and through critical thought and action, “it is impossible to deny the constitutive power of their consciousness in the social practice in which they participate (Freire and Macedo, 2008, p. 355). Artz also agrees that a serious limitation to traditional service learning pedagogy is the *service learning as charity* model often employed in higher education (and often reproduced in the K-12 SL model). He posits that this model provides students with opportunities to identify community needs, serves as a way to address the needs, yet fails to provide outlets for reflection and consideration of the structural forces that perpetuate the injustices. It also fails to provide opportunities to meaningfully reflect *with* the community in which they serve as to why the injustice occurs and how their own (the student’s) individual biases may serve as limitations to social justice. The basis for Artz’s (2001) argument is that “charity, by itself, as a basis for service learning, will not likely lead to a sustained social critique or action” (p. 240). He notes, “charity frequently denies the possibility of social change by implying that the poor or oppressed are less competent and less able than those who have more social, cultural, and economic capital” (p. 240). Artz (2001) stresses the need to move beyond a service learning pedagogy that fails to challenge structural forces and allows for a discourse that promotes mutually inclusive dialogue between service learning students and the *oppressed* in

order to promote social action, not charity. Mitchell (2008) similarly argues that the goal of critical service learning, as opposed to traditional service learning, is to deconstruct and dismantle power structures that perpetuate the need for service and serve to sustain social inequalities.

Maybach (1996) points out that early criticism of service learning was based on outcome research reflecting an almost singular focus on student growth. This work tended to ignore how the service was affecting the communities involved. She emphasizes a significant need to move beyond learning by doing and that the necessary paradigm shift towards a more critical approach to service learning must begin with recognition of terms and definitions in the field that promote hegemony. In order to change the oppressive dynamic represented by a model of *false charity*, service-learning language should move from *service provider* and *service recipient* to more inclusive terms that reflect cooperative interaction and mutual respect, such as *partners in service*. She also states that reciprocity built on mutual respect and learning will lead to a greater sense of empowerment and serve to “confront the systemic causes of oppression in society” (Maybach, 1996, p. 223). In regards to serving marginalized peoples, the author agrees with Noddings (1992), who stated, “Children – or any human beings – ought not to be used merely as a means” (p. 68). She notes that empowerment is not a result of *servicing* or *being served*, but is rather a result being in a non-oppressive relationship with others of diverse backgrounds, abilities, and experiences, working together to transform people and communities through a continuum of caring that provides far more than meeting an academic outcome or masking larger social inequities by the meeting of an *immediate* need.

An important point emphasized by Artz (2001) is that critical service learning must be approached with care at the institutional level, as “all too often, the university functions to

safeguard dominant social relations, ideologies, and practices” (p. 242.) The very nature of critical service learning hinges on a direct focus on the “relationships between power and culture, communication and ideology” (p. 242) which are often materialized as tensions between the academic and community fields. This rationale is also relevant to the current structures of schooling in the K-12 arena. Mitchell (2008) also acknowledges that a critical approach to service learning may be difficult to implement within institutional and societal structures that are traditionally resistant to social change, yet she predicts that the “promise of the approach” to question the status-quo and activate change will invariably lead to critical service learning as the “next direction” of the field (p. 62). Mitchell (2008) also notes that to successfully engage students in meaningful critical service learning pedagogy, there must be a redistribution of power among all stakeholders, authentic, reciprocal relationships between students and community, and the precinct of a social change orientation.

### **Critical Pedagogy of Place**

One thread that connects critical service learning to community transformation is the adoption of a critical pedagogy of place, allowing students to formulate a situational identity that empowers them to become social advocates for change within their own communities. Gruenwald (2003) argues that the current focus of education on high-stakes, standards-based testing, accountability, and economic function serves to diminish the necessity of *place* within education by overshadowing the important, i.e., critical, component of “situated context” towards the goal of “social transformation” (p. 4). He states that there is a need to “invite theorists, researchers, and practitioners to deepen and expand their work by consciously blending approaches from these [critical pedagogy and place-based education] powerful traditions” (p. 4). He further states, “critical place-based pedagogy cannot be only about struggles with human

oppression. People must be challenged to reflect on their own concrete situationality in a way that explores the complex interrelationships between cultural and ecological environments” (P. 6).

More importantly, he defines two key objectives towards this end as what he terms “decolonization and reinhabitation”. *Reinhabitation* requires identification, affirmation, conservation and creation of the cultural capital that “nurtures and protects people and ecosystems” (attributed to Bowers, 2001) as a way to “address the specificities of the experiences, problems, languages, and histories that communities rely upon to construct a narrative of collective identity and possible transformation” (attributed to McLaren & Giroux, 1990). He defines *decolonization* as the process of “learning to recognize [this] disruption and injury and address their causes” (p. 9) and notes it is the necessary foundation for reinhabitation. He goes on to state that *decolonization*, for education, requires “unlearning much of what dominant culture and schooling teaches” (p. 9) and relearning more socio-ecologically just ways of being *in* and *with* the world. As a final note, he strongly argues that the current modes of educational research and classroom practice serve as limiting factors for the realization of a critical pedagogy of place and if it is to be actualized, theorists, researchers, and practitioners must drastically address/alter their own ways of thinking, acting, and being.

Stemhagen and Hall (2016) also offer a unique perspective on critical pedagogy of place by contrasting Dewey’s notion of bringing *community into the classroom* and Gruenwald’s notion of bringing *the classroom into the community*. They do this by considering the work of Lewis Mumford. They note,

Mumford introduces regional survey as a means to mediate the science-values split that he sees as so damaging to society. In setting up the problems with this schism, Mumford

notes, ‘scientific knowledge has not merely heightened the possibilities of life in the modern world: it has lowered the depths. When science is not touched by a sense of value, it works—as it fairly consistently has during the past century—towards a complete dehumanization of the social order.’ (p. 276)

During this early stage, Mumford described the purpose of regional survey as taking a particular geographic area and studying/exploring it from a variety of vantage points: He explained that:

It differs from the social survey with which we are acquainted in America in that it is not chiefly a survey of evils; it is, rather, a survey of the existing conditions in all their aspects; and it emphasizes to a much greater extent than the social survey the natural characteristics of the environment, as they are discovered by the geologist, the zoologist, the ecologist—in addition to the development of natural and human conditions in the historic past as presented by the anthropologist, the archaeologist, and the historian. In short, the regional survey attempts a local synthesis of all the specialist “knowledges.” (p. 279)

In *The Culture of Cities* (CC), Mumford sketches the implications for regional survey to serve as a more meaningful education than that which was typically going on in the late 1930s. Mumford claims “Most of our educational routine... has substituted mere paper counters for reality. The elimination of concrete views and concrete experiences has reduced rather than widened the sphere of effective education” (1938, p. 385). This tendency toward abstraction in school, Mumford rightly notes, is not present at the outset of schooling, but it quickly asserts itself and this change has implications for life beyond school. In CC Mumford describes regional survey as a way to ensure that students actually engage in observing, analyzing, and improving their world around them. He notes,

Once the human scale is overpassed, once the concrete fact disappears from view, knowledge becomes remote, abstract and overwhelming: a lifetime's effort will not provide sufficient grasp of the environment. The more people who are thrust together in a limited area, without organic relationships, without a means of achieving an autonomous education or preserving autonomous political activities in their working and living relations, the more they must become subject to external routine and manipulation. (p. 386)

This view of a critical pedagogy of place, as seen through the critical lens of Dewey's Democratic Education and Mumford's Regional Survey, lends itself to both critical service learning and photovoice by allowing students to take cross-curricular learning out into the community as a form of participatory action and in turn, bring the community back into the classroom through meaning-making and contextualization. As Stemhagen and Hall (2016) note, "These sorts of projects have the promise to help children to see their community as *their* community, to better understand it and to feel that it is a place worth caring about and working to preserve/improve" (p. 12).

### **Counter-Narration: From Deficit to Possibility Perspective**

Like Gruenwald and Stemhagen & Hall, Duncan-Andrade (2007) also addresses the need for a critical pedagogy that allows youth to deconstruct dominant narratives surrounding their cultures and communities and to create a counter-narrative to the deficit model approach. The counter-narrative approach serves as a vehicle to empower marginalized youth to find their voice and enact change in their own schools and communities, addressing issues of social and educational inequities perpetuated by current paradigms. He argues that a critical literacy

pedagogy, through the use of counter-narratives, “presents powerful pathways to the development of student agency against conditions of urban social inequality [and] positively impact the development of critical civic literacy, civic awareness, and civic participation among urban youth” (p. 26).

In a study hosted by UCLA’s Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) for Los Angeles 11<sup>th</sup> grade African American and Latino/a students from various local high schools, students participated in “socially engaged scholarship” as a form of action research, serving as an “intervention for emancipatory change” (p. 28). Students spent the summer discussing critical theory, participatory research, and youth action while creating a video about the injustices and assets in their schools and communities. The outcomes of the study support youth voice and counter-narration as a powerful means for transformation of schools and society. By allowing students to find their *place* and use their knowledge and capital to construct and circulate a counter-narrative, the power differentials shift and the potential for shifts in perception, both individual and collective, are increased, leading to greater opportunity for community transformation. Duncan-Andrade (2007) states,

Urban youth bring unique and important insight to the dialogue about social justice.

They experience the material conditions of urban poverty in visceral ways that cannot be captured through adult lenses. Sadly, schools and the larger society have failed to create avenues for youth to discuss their understandings of the problems and conditions facing urban centers. The absence of these narratives not only has meant the increasing marginalization of urban youth but also has meant that insight into solutions to these problems has been overlooked. (p. 35)

To expand upon the idea that youth action (specifically actions taken by marginalized youth) is a powerful tool to address the pressing social issues surrounding marginalized schools and communities, it is imperative to give some insight into the deficit-model versus resource-model approaches to education. Paris (2012) provides a succinct definition of the deficit thinking approach popular prior to and throughout the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Paris notes,

Deficit approaches to teaching and learning...viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimized dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling (see Lee, 2007, Paris & Ball, 2009, Smitherman, 1977, and Valdés, 1996, for further discussion of the deficit to resource paradigm trajectory in research and practice). The dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices demanded by school fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society. Simply put, the goal of deficit approaches was to eradicate the linguistic, literate, and cultural practices many students of color brought from their homes and communities and to replace them with what were viewed as superior practices. (p. 93)

Sadly, the dominant educational and social narrative surrounding marginalized students, schools, and communities often remains unchanged from this deficit-model approach, with the view that the cultural capital of poor students, students of color, and students outside the *norm* are somehow less valid, therefore less valued, in schools and society, and must be *fixed* in order for positive learning and action to occur (Kohn, 2004; Yosso, 2005; Ginwright, Noguera, &

Cammarota, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Noguera, 2003, 2009, & 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010, Valencia, 2010; Paris, 2012).

In resistance to the deficit-model approach, a resource perspective approach to education began to emerge through a Critical Race Theory lens and was subsequently reinforced by the works of Moll & Gonzales (1994) through their concept of *funds of knowledge* and Yosso (2005) with the *community cultural wealth* concept. These emergent pedagogical practices, and others offering critique of the sources and value of knowledge, “have looked to join the home and community practices, histories, and activities of students and communities of color with dominant school ones in meaningful ways that do not devalue either in the process of school learning and access” (Paris, 2012, p. 94). Based on the theoretical understandings of Pierre Bourdieu, the knowledges (cultural, social, and economic capital) possessed by the middle and upper class are valued in a society bound by social stratification and those in the lower class can only experience social mobility through formal schooling, leading to social and cultural reproduction of the dominant, White, middle-class *norm* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). According to Yosso (2005), “the assumption follows that People of Color lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility” (p. 70). This assumption leads to institutions (schools) being structured in a way to *help* those that are perceived to be lacking in valued capital (based on race and class), perpetuating a hierarchy of social inequality.

Yosso (2005) offers an alternative approach, the concept of community cultural wealth, which critiques the assumption that marginalized students come to the classroom *lacking* and challenges traditional Bourdieuean interpretations, specifically the assertion that “some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor” (p. 76). Yosso defines community cultural wealth as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed

and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression” (p. 77). It is this concept of community cultural wealth and its value inherent that will move students, educators, and communities beyond looking to *fix* deficiencies towards a more equitable possibilities perspective of not only *what can be* but also *what is*.

According to Moll and Gonzales (1994), *funds of knowledge* are “those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being” (p. 443). They note that viewing marginalized students and communities from a funds of knowledge perspective has transformative potential to dismantle assumptions that marginalized families lack valid knowledge, skills, and experiences. This view highlights the tensions between agency and structure, allowing “the actual and everyday experiences of students’ lives [to be] privileged over uniform, integrated and standardized cultural norms” (p. 445). Based on Bourdieuan theory, structure and agency exist in a dialectic, not dichotomous, relationship as the structure of schooling often serves to dismiss marginalized students’ lived experiences while simultaneously promoting a perceived sense of agency. If we are to challenge this status quo, Moll and Gonzales (1994) suggest that we must “overcome the intellectual limits of traditional schooling” for marginalized students (p. 451). In sum, if we are to move beyond deficit-thinking approaches in schools and communities, we must not only seek to identify the varied funds of knowledge possessed by our students, but also to cultivate, incorporate, and legitimize them into our everyday narratives.

Valencia (2010) also proposes that an alternative to deficit thinking (regardless of the form taken in schools) is democratic education. He notes, “deficit thinking arbitrarily denies students the opportunity to maximize human powers” and that a democratic education “requires the conscious creation of an optimum learning environment and taking the necessary pains to

ensure that all students have access to such an environment” (Valencia, 2010, p. 154). This speaks to the importance of the development of citizenship skills in schooling to promote a possibilities perspective approach. He states, “the more the student is given opportunity to engage in citizenship development activities, the more the student will be able to provide evidence of an educational potential in which deficit thinking has not been allowed to emerge” (p. 156-157).

It is through the lens of resource-based perspective (possibility perspective) that one can imagine the power of a critical service learning approach using photo-voice methodology to construct narratives counter to the dominant in the hope of moving beyond deficit-model thinking towards a democratic education that benefits (and possibly alters perceptions of) marginalized students, schools, and communities.

### **Photovoice as Critical Service Learning: The Blending of Research Methods and Pedagogy Community-based Participatory Research**

Bringle, Clayton and Price (2009) indicate:

one of the defining characteristics of contemporary models of civic engagement (i.e., service learning) is a mutually-beneficial collaboration, in which all persons contribute knowledge, skills, and experience in determining the issues to be addressed, the questions to be asked, the problems to be resolved, the strategies to be used, the outcomes that are considered desirable, and the indicators of success. (p. 1)

This defining characteristic is closely aligned with the definition of Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) as,

a collaborative, partnership approach to research that equitably involves, for example, community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the

research process. Partners contribute their expertise and share responsibilities and ownership to increase understanding of a given phenomenon, and incorporate the knowledge gained with action – emphasizing the participation, influence, and control by non-academic researchers in the process of creating knowledge and change. (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998, p. 184)

Israel, *et al.*, (1998) also identify several key principles of CBPR as recognition of community as a unit of identity; it builds on strengths and resources within the community; facilitates collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research; integrates knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners; and promotes a co-learning and empowerment process that attends to social inequalities. The work of Freire in the 1970's greatly influenced the acceptance of community-based research as one in which communities are active participants in inquiry, not mere objects of study (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2010). Wallerstein and Duran (2010) note that Freire's understanding of research and inquiry:

provides a psychosocial understanding of how emancipatory knowledge can lead to having the power to make change. As people engage in dialogue with each other about their communities and the larger social context, their own internal thought patterns and beliefs about their social world change; their relationships to each other become strengthened; and ultimately, they enhance their capacities to reflect on their own values and to make new choices. (p. 33)

In critical service learning pedagogy, and photovoice as a form of critical service learning, the stakeholders are the students, organizations/institutions, and resident members and their interests and histories (their stories) are closely linked to the needs of the community. By focusing on students' (stakeholders') agency in the research process through photo

documentation (observation), feedback, interviews (photo elicitation), reflection, and analysis, they have the opportunity, alongside the researcher, to evaluate the reciprocity of each stakeholder involved, providing valuable insight into perceptions and meaning that serve to empower.

One important distinction to make here is between (critical) service learning and youth participatory action research (YPAR). YPAR is defined as “is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development based in social justice principles in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them” (YPAR Hub, 2015). The act of participating in critical service learning does not necessarily involve systematic research on the part of youth but it can, as seen in this project. My focus is on photovoice as a form of critical service learning, not necessarily YPAR, so the review of literature has focused on this interpretation. For this reason, it has been helpful to read the literature available by those conducting YPAR, not as a method I am employing specifically, but as a way to help frame my own positionality within this project and to also understand what is explicit to critical service learning and what is specific to YPAR. Several examples of those conducting YPAR studies share many similarities to my own line of inquiry and it is important to recognize their efforts as contributors to youth voice and action (Baldrige, 2012; Bertrand, 2012; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Ginwright, 2010; Powers & Allaman, 2012; Cammarota & Fine, 2008).

### **Photovoice as Critical Pedagogy**

Photovoice is defined as “the process by which people identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang, Yuan, & Feng, 1996, p. 47). Wang and Burris (1994 and 1997) are credited with creating the photovoice concept, method,

and use for participatory action research (primarily in the health fields) and have provided researchers with a foundational format that includes three main goals: “enable people to (1) record and represent their everyday realities; (2) promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community strengths and concerns; and (3) reach policymakers” (Wang, 1999, p. 148). As a methodology, the theoretical foundations of photovoice are most often rooted in education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and photo documentation (Wang, 1999; Wang, 2000; Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchinson, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004; Wang, 2006; Malloy, 2007). Freire’s idea of critical consciousness assumes that the individual is able to address their current reality from an historical and social standpoint that leads to change (Freire, 1970) and he has argued that the use of photographic images can serve to inspire groups to collectively analyze their community’s social conditions, leading to collective action for change (Freire, 1973; Desyllas, 2010). As Malloy (2007) states, “photovoice uses images, as depicted by the community to reflect the social and political realities that influence people’s lives” (p. 42), therefore, photographs have the power to conceptualize the everyday lived experience, allowing for a heightened sense of critical consciousness.

[Critical Consciousness] recognizes the energy and potential within each person and each community, and tries to empower them to make their full contribution to the process of building a new society in which it is possible for all people to meet their fundamental human needs. (Hope & Timmel, 1991, p. 16)

Feminist theory indicates that those with *voice* hold the most power and in practice, posits that every individual’s subjective experience is valid and by this, allows power differentials to shift towards a more equitable balance (Malloy, 2007). Photovoice, as a form of feminist theory, “aims to give power, through images and conversations, to those who often are not heard or

included in decisions” (Malloy, 2007, p. 42), thus providing the potential for opening discursive spaces for the creation (and circulation) of counter-narratives.

According to Desyllas (2010), photovoice offers many advantages: “(a) for those with the least amount of power; (b) for those holding more power; and (c) for the community at large” (p. 83). For those often ignored in society, or less-valued, photovoice provides an opportunity “to represent and enhance one’s own communities through a vivid and specific way of taking pictures and telling stories” (Desyllas, 2010, p. 83). Rollins (2007) summarizes this best:

When the subordinated represent, they also re-present and reposition themselves apart from a location of disenfranchisement, alienation, and social invisibility. We capture responsibility for our appearances. The re-presentation of representation, especially self-representation, performs a coup over the dominance of forced inscriptions. (p.8)

By using photographic images to narrate the experiences and perceptions of marginalized individuals and communities through the lens of their own realities, “every re-presentation establishes new boundaries, a new sense of place, space and meaning” (Desyllas, 2010, p. 84) which, in turn, may serve to change stereotypes and re-write the dominant narrative (Rollins, 2007).

### **Summary and Synthesis: We Are...**

As detailed in the review of the literature, marginalized groups are often plagued by deficit-thinking perspectives, either about them or by them, and sometimes both. These deficit-thinking ideologies appear to be most prevalent in poor schools and communities of color and the impacts on self and community can be far reaching. Through this study, I posit photovoice as critical service learning as an effective way to dismantle dominant deficit thinking perspectives by creating discursive spaces for alternative narratives to be constructed and to circulate. By

viewing (and facilitating) photovoice as a form of critical service learning, I hope to create a space for marginalized students to highlight the perceived strengths and assets of self and community, with the potential of moving towards the possibility perspective approach outlined by Paris (2012). The guiding idea behind this project is that we can construct counter narratives, but if they have no space to circulate, then marginalized voices are still silenced, e.g. if a student says her community isn't so bad and no one is there to hear it, does she make a sound? What this offers Academia is a way to get beyond the idea of the counter narrative itself — adding depth and breadth as it seeks to show one way to construct a space for the growth and circulation of these counter narratives. In the following chapter, I detail how and with whom the construction of these spaces occurred. I also detail the data collection and analysis processes that was selected as the best fit to address the research questions. As I move from the review of the literature into the methodology, we begin the journey of “We Are...”: a photovoice as critical service learning project highlighting the self-perceived strengths and assets of marginalized students and their community.

## **Chapter Three**

### **METHODOLOGY**

For this study, I employed an exploratory qualitative study using photovoice, photo elicitation, and critical thematic analysis. Each of these qualitative tools are discussed in detail, as they relate to this project, throughout this chapter.

#### **Research Questions**

- What narratives do students construct about their identity, their community, and their sense of place within their community through participation in a photovoice critical service-learning project?
- What narratives do students construct about their ability to be change agents in their community through participation in a photovoice critical service-learning project?
- How, in particular, does photovoice as critical service learning contribute to the construction of student narratives about themselves and their community?

#### **Research Design & Rationale**

This study employed a photovoice methodology in which students used cameras to document their realities – the perceived strengths and assets of their school and community – hopefully as a way to construct narratives that counter the dominant deficit perspective often held about and by marginalized students and communities and to create discursive spaces for which those narratives may exist and circulate.

Delgado (2015) notes, “research serves the critical dual purpose of generating knowledge and being an integral part of a social intervention” and has “also prescribed a role for researchers

as discoverers of new knowledge, but with the responsibility of ensuring that this knowledge translates into purposeful social action, particularly in the case of those researchers focusing their efforts on the marginalized of society” (p. 3). He goes on to posit that this emerging identity of *researchers as social activists* has led to innovative research methods that have shown promise for empowering marginalized communities to construct meaningful, positive change on a localized level that is inclusive and liberatory. One such social science research method that has emerged from this ideology is photovoice.

In their handbook, *From SnapShot to Civic Action: A Photovoice Facilitator’s Manuel*, Powers, Freedman, and Pitner’s (2012) consolidated definition of photovoice is a good fit with this project:

a community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach that integrates Photography and critical discussion to examine issues from the perspective of the “resident experts” – the people living, working, playing, and praying in a targeted context (Wang, 2003). Insights from photovoice processes are then used to inform grassroots social action (Wang & Burris, 1994). Photovoice is ultimately focused on promoting change at personal and community levels. It empowers people to develop a critical assessment of their reality, share this information with important stakeholders, and promote change based on these insights. Drawing upon feminist theory, “Photovoice participants work to change the way their public presence is defined: Photovoice represents part of the attempt to disrupt and ultimately revise the views of gender, class, ethnicity, and other forces that contribute to oppression (Wang & Pies, 2008, p.185). (p. 9)

Delgado (2015) draws on Booth and Booth (2002) to describe the photovoice process as challenging “the established politics of representation by shifting the means of documenting lives from the powerful to the powerless, the expert to the lay person, the professional to the client, the bureaucrat to the citizen, the observer to the observed” (p.432). Reinforcing these views, Mitchell (2011) states,

doing visual research offers researchers in the social sciences an innovative orientation to the ways in which visual tools such as photography, video, drawing and objects can be used as modes of inquiry, modes of representation, and modes of dissemination in research related to social change. (p. xi)

The use of photography by urban youth for social change facilitates the “construction of local identity and community building” which “wields such a tremendous influence in shaping perceptions and experiences” and promotes affirming beliefs and attitudes regarding themselves and their community (Delgado, 2015, p. 5; also references Loopmans, Cowell, & Oosterlynck, 2012 and Spencer, 2011).

Desyllas (2010) explains that research participants are empowered through arts-informed paradigms [such as photovoice] that hand over “creativity (the contents of the research) and its interpretation (the explanation of its content)” to the participants, resulting in content that “is more culturally exact and explicit, utilizing emotional and cognitive ways of knowing” (p. 16). She strengthens the argument for employment of photovoice by providing a comprehensive overview of the benefits of this family of approaches drawing on Butler-Kisber (2008) and describing the growing interest in using arts-based inquiry to “counteract the hegemony and linearity in written texts, to increase voice and reflexivity in the research process, and to expand the possibilities of multiple, diverse realities and understandings” (p. 268, as cited in Desyllas,

2010, p. 53). It has the potential for offering ways of re-visioning issues that are simply not possible through descriptive linear language. According to Finley (2008), arts-based research: (1) makes use of emotive, affective experiences, senses, and bodies, and imagination, as well as intellect, as ways of knowing and responding to the world; (2) gives interpretive license to the researcher to create meaning from experience; (3) attends the role of form (e.g. photography) in shaping meaning; and (4) exists in the tensions of blurred boundaries, between art and social science research. McNiff (2008) claims that new knowledge is created while crossing those boundaries of previously separated domains (arts and science); when ideas are placed in new relationships to one another.

Oftentimes, what researchers may think is important in a community may neglect what the community actually views as being important. Again, photovoice method views participants as the experts on their own lives and communities because they hold a visual voice. The visual image is a site of learning and images have the potential of conveying more meaning and feeling than text. The image itself is not as powerful as the meaning people attribute to the photograph (Wang, 1999). Wang believes that images contribute to how we define ourselves, how we define and relate to the world, and what we perceive as being important or different. Using this method with marginalized populations whose voice is often missing from society, or whose image is often misrepresented in the media, can be a powerful catalyst for change.

### **Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted within a marginalized community located in an urban region of a mid-Atlantic state. For the purpose of this study, I have adopted van den Hoonaard's (2008) definition of a marginalized community, defined as

a community through which its members find themselves out of the mainstream based on their membership in socially meaningful groups [due to a] variety of characteristics such as religion, social class, ethnicity, visible racial characteristics, gender, age, and sexual orientation, [and in this case], by living in a socially identified marginalized community and attending a school within the marginalized community. [A member's] social status related to these characteristics is based on an interpretation of their meaningfulness rather than on any innate qualities they might have. (van den Hoonaard, 2008, p. 491)

I have been a member of this community for the past ten years, serving as both an insider and outsider. I previously taught at the school for eight years and for the past three years, have continued to work closely with students and families within the school and community on a weekly basis. Over the course of my time here, I have become recognized as an active community participant and an accepted member of the school, as well as a valued mentor and confidante to many students and families. I am often invited to (and attend) birthday parties, family reunions, and community celebrations as an insider. I have taught numerous children of the same families and still keep in touch with students and their parents well after their middle-school years. That said, I am also an outsider as I don't live within the community, I am not native to the area (the study site is an urban area and I grew up in a rural mountain town in another state, although high poverty rates and marginalization are prevalent in both), and I am white in a predominantly black school and community. I acknowledge that my background and experiences outside of this setting may be very different from those of my students and their families and that my positionality will color my view of the setting and participants for this study. For this reason, I will draw on Dwyer and Buckle's (2009) notion of *the space between*, that is, not viewing insider/outsider status as a necessary dichotomy of separateness but rather as

a blending of two binaries that then serves to provide deeper meaning, understanding, and appreciation for the complexity of dynamic perspectives and experiences. As Dwyer and Buckle point out, “holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference” (p. 60).

This particular community, based on 2010 zip code demographic data (US Census Bureau, 2010), has a population of 47, 677. The county itself is part of a larger metro region that has an estimated population of 1, 260, 029, making it the third most populous metro region in the state (US Census Bureau, 2015). The study site sits on the eastern side of the county bordering the city limit (less than two miles from the county-city line) and the demographics of the school and community are markedly different from other areas of the county. Based on 2015 Census Data, the racial make-up of the county was 58.6% White, 29.6% Black /African American and 5.3% Hispanic/Latino with 8.1% of families living below the poverty level. The community, on the other hand, has a racial make-up of 17% White, 78% Black/African American, and 1.9% Hispanic/Latino with 25.8% of families living below the poverty level (US Census Bureau, 2015). Also of note, a recent report states that the district encompassing the school and community study site has the highest crime rate in the county, higher than the three surrounding districts combined (Henrico Police Division, 2017).

Participants in this study are current public middle school students living within the identified marginalized community. The school these students attend is a large, urban middle school serving grades 6-8 within the county discussed above. The county school division serves approx. 51, 534 (K-12) students in 67 schools. The racial make-up of the school division (for the 2015-2016 school year) is 47% White, 36% Black/African American, and 6.2% Hispanic/Latino. For the 2016-2017 school year, 48 schools within the district were fully

accredited, 12 were partially accredited, and seven were denied accreditation by the state's Department of Education based on academic benchmark data (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). It is important to note that all seven of the schools denied accreditation, including the study site, are located on the eastern end of the county.

The school itself was built in 1959 and has been a cornerstone of the community since. The school was first constructed on the site of an operating dairy farm and the surrounding community was primarily farmland, serving a very different demographic than it does today. Over the past 35 years, large public housing developments have been constructed around the school and the highest concentration of social service youth *group homes* are located within the community of interest, with many of these youth zoned for the study site. In addition, the community lies within an identified *food desert*, meaning residents have to travel a mile or more for access to fresh produce (US Department of Agriculture, 2017). The metro bus line travels to/from the community close to the city line but the county does not offer a viable public transportation infrastructure as you move further into the community (GRTC Transit System, 2017).

At the time of this study, the school's population was approximately 1017 students in grades 6-8 with a racial demographic of 6% White, 87% Black/African-American, and 3% Hispanic with 62% of the students eligible to receive free/reduced lunch assistance. Of the total school safety offenses reported for the entire school district during the 2015-2016 school year, 7% occurred at the study site (Virginia Department of Education, 2017). This demographic data is important to provide a baseline context for the setting, but more importantly, it is my own anecdotal evidence that may provide a clearer understanding of the divide that continues to separate and marginalize this community.

When I first began teaching at the school site, I was attending a youth football game in another part of the county and shared with a friend where I taught. Her response was, “I am sure you’re a great teacher so why aren’t you teaching in a *better* school?” I was shocked, as a newcomer to the region and my only experiences in education in the county being within my school and classroom, that she would make this statement. What I had experienced so far was that my school was a good school and my students were smart, capable, and motivated. Several times over the next few years, I experienced similar statements from *outsiders*. Sharing the location of where I taught with anyone outside of the direct community often elicited an “I’m sorry” response at best to “aren’t you afraid to walk from the parking lot to your classroom?” at worst. Once, when talking with a group of teachers from elsewhere in the district about an amazing service-learning project my kids had completed, I was met with the statement, “wow, that’s impressive that you can do those things with *those* kids”. The negative perceptions didn’t stop there. It was not uncommon for my students to claim that a new teacher had left suddenly in the middle of a school year because “they can’t handle us, we’re too bad” or so-and-so teacher was crying in class and said, “we are the worst kids he/she’s ever seen”. More recently, one of my students was selected to participate in a statewide academic summer program for high-achieving students and I asked her how the experience had gone. She said, “it was great because they didn’t know what school I was from so everyone treated me the same as everyone else. When we go to band competitions and have to wear our [school] shirts, people instantly treat us differently than they do when they don’t know where we’re from.”

These statements and experiences are often in direct opposition to my own experiences at the site and within the community. Yes, many of the students have negative outside experiences that influence their ability and behavior in school. Yes, we receive less monetary support from

parents as compared to other, more-affluent areas of the district. Yes, in terms of numbers alone, we have less parental attendance and involvement (my personal experiences with families in this community attribute this to a lack of transportation and/or time off from work, not a lack of interest), and yes, we experience a high teacher turnover rate annually. That said, the school has strong connections to the community, offering a wealth of resources for parents and students. There is also strong parental support for outside learning opportunities and extra-curricular activities and in my own experiences, the parents of my students truly do care about their student's academic and personal growth and achievement. There is a strong administrative support system at the school and students are offered a wide array of academic, social, and emotional growth opportunities through clubs, sports, academic enrichment, tutoring, etc. The school also promotes a site-wide mentoring program that includes numerous students, faculty, and community supporters.

As discussed in the previous literature review, the sentiments by *outsiders* have the potential to take their toll on students, teachers, and the broader community by promoting a deficit-thinking perspective that reinforces negative stereotypes and limits the spaces available for alternative narratives to circulate.

### **Participant Selection**

The study participants were chosen through purposive selection. Purposive selection, also known as criterion-based selection (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), allows the researcher to “use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this group [and] to ensure that certain types of individuals or persons displaying certain attributes are included in the study” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 52). To better meet the needs of this study, it is important that the research subjects (a) participate in the critical service-learning program, and

(b) live and attend school within the identified marginalized community. Individual race, gender, or SES was not used as selective criteria.

To ensure that participants clearly understand the nature of the study, all participants must have participated in a critical service-learning program for a minimum of two years. The program is an after-school service club with the purpose of cultivating the power of youth voice to address social issues for community change through critical service learning. By participating for a minimum of two years, students will have at the least, a basic understanding of key concepts relevant to this study, as the amount of time to develop even a basic understanding of these concepts is outside the scope and time constraints of this project. This baseline understanding would include the definition of critical service learning, how it is used to address social issues in the community, youth voice and how it is used to create change, and the various meanings of social justice. By participating for a least two years, students gain this understanding by participating in a number of service learning projects such as an annual denim drive and community fashion show to raise awareness about youth homelessness, a school garden initiative with a student-led farmer's market to address the lack of fresh, affordable food in the community, a community social-justice showcase allowing students to express their concerns about current social and political issues through a variety of art mediums, and an anti-stereotyping campaign using student-created PSAs to address bullying at the school.

The critical service-learning program facilitated at the school site is founded in service learning Standards of Quality Practice as outlined by the National Youth Leadership Council (2008). The after-school program serves to connect academic content to local social issues affecting students and their community. The program is open to all students in grades 6-8 and meets for two hours every week during the regular school year, with additional service learning

opportunities offered during some weekends and summer break. Student voice, action, and critical reflection are foundational components of the program. Through this program, students participate in collaborative, critical discussion of local social issues, participate in social justice oriented workshops, research, design and facilitate service projects that meet community-identified needs (in collaboration with community partners), and critically reflect on their role as social change agents. Although this club is unique within the greater school division, the idea of cultivating a service ethic and providing student-centered meaning-making through social justice oriented practice is not unique at this school. The school has recently adopted a Mindfulness model and a Trauma-informed Care approach with the goal being to engage and empower ALL students by providing practical, community-embedded teaching and learning approaches for addressing school and community challenges. The school also hosts an extended school year program that provides college and career readiness experiences through a social-justice oriented lens with the hope of cultivating not just scholars, but community engaged scholars. In addition to the critical service-learning club, these similar approaches and opportunities permeate throughout the school culture and climate.

At the time of this study, there were 37 registered members of the club. Of those, approximately 20 attended on a regular, weekly basis. Based on the parameters of participant selection, of the 20 active club members for this school year, there were eight students that have participated in the critical service-learning program for at least two years. Of these eight students, six identify as female and two identify as male. Four students identify as Black/African American, three identify as White/Caucasian, and one student identifies as Hispanic/Latino. One student was a current 7<sup>th</sup> grader and seven students were current 8<sup>th</sup> graders at the time of the study. Although gender, race, and grade level were not criteria for participation, this sample is

indicative of the actual sample pool of potential participants as the majority of club members this year identified as Black and female and a large percentage were current 6<sup>th</sup> graders and therefore, have not participated in the program for the minimum number of years to meet sample selection criteria.

All eligible students were invited to participate in this study through individual invitations emailed to their parents/guardians and through follow-up phone calls. The invitation outlined the parameters of the study and invited guardians and eligible students to attend an interest meeting prior to the start of the study (See Appendix A). During this meeting, students and guardians were provided with in depth details of the study (including purpose, methods, timeline, commitment required, and ethical concerns) as well as the chance to ask questions and express concerns. Following the study overview presentation and discussion, students and parents were given the opportunity to agree to participate or not by signing the assent/consent forms (See Appendix B). Of the eight eligible participants, seven students agreed to participate by providing consent signatures from themselves and their parents.

### **Data Collection**

Wang and Burris (1994 and 1997) are attributed with creating the photovoice concept, method, and use for participatory action research (primarily in the health fields) and have provided researchers with a foundational format that includes three main goals and a “nine step strategy to mobilize community action through the use of photovoice” (Wang, 2006, P. 142). Wang’s identified goals “enable people to (1) record and represent their everyday realities; (2) promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community strengths and concerns; and (3) reach policymakers” (p. 148). An overview of their nine-step strategy for implementing photovoice as a research method is:

1. Select and recruit a target audience of policy makers or community leaders;
2. Recruit a group of photovoice participants;
3. Introduce the photovoice methodology to participants, and facilitate a group discussion about cameras, power, and ethics;
4. Obtain informed consent;
5. Pose initial theme/s for taking pictures;
6. Distribute cameras to participants and review how to use the camera;
7. Provide time for participants to take pictures;
8. Meet to discuss photographs and identify themes;
9. Plan with participants a format to share photographs and stories with policy makers or community leaders (p. 149-152).

In *Urban Youth and Photovoice: Visual Ethnography in Action*, Melvin Delgado (2015) takes Wang's initial tenants of photovoice, as well as the methodological adaptations from more recent studies using photovoice, and provides the most comprehensive synthesis to date of using photovoice methodology when working with urban youth. For the purposes of this study, it is important to identify just what I mean by *urban youth* as definitions and descriptions of *urban* vary widely within the field. I have elected to use Milner's (2012) conceptions. For this study, urban youth are characterized as youth living and going to school in an environment that exhibits characteristics of Milner's *Urban Intensive* and *Urban Emergent* categories. The Urban Intensive context applies because the infrastructure, size, and density of the locale make it difficult to provide adequate resources to those who need them and the broader environments, outside of school factors such as housing, poverty, and transportation are directly connected to what happens inside of the school. Urban Intensive is a seemingly more accurate snapshot of

those living in this community as it is indicative of the city bordering the study community and this context spills over into the county, which, as a whole, could be categorized as Urban Emergent, where the “realities of the surrounding communities are not as complex as those in the intensive category” (p. 559).

It is important to note here that the initial stage of many photovoice projects includes selection of political and/or community leaders that would benefit from the outcomes of the project and the final stage includes dissemination of the photographs and narratives to these leaders/the public at large to raise awareness about a particular issue that emerged during data collection/analysis and to enact social change regarding this issue (as outlined in the previous literature). For the purpose and scope of this project, these initial and final stages of the photovoice project were not included in this study. It is my intent to continue to work with the participants within this community and to host a dissemination event at a later time. As a reminder, the purpose of this study was to focus on the creation of discursive spaces and the narratives that students construct through participation in a photovoice project, not specifically the impact the circulation of those narratives have on the broader community and/or the social issues affecting said community. However, I hope that I will be able to explore that avenue of study in the very near future as a result of these research findings.

In his work, Delgado notes several published manuals for working with urban youth through photovoice projects and provides a succinct overview for conducting photovoice projects with urban youth. After reviewing these manuals and researching Delgado’s methods and findings in more depth, I chose to use Powers, Freedman, and Pitner’s (2012) resource manual, *Final Snapshot to Civic Action: A Photovoice Facilitator’s Manual* as the methodological outline for this project with my own adaptations to more closely meet the needs

of this project and the students and community I worked with. I chose this specific model because it is easily aligned with my research questions, it meets the time constraints of this project timeline, it is appropriate for use with the age range of my participants, it is easily accessible, and it is easily adaptable for immediate use. The phases of this adapted model also closely align with several service learning Standards of Quality Practice (NYLC, 2008), furthering the claim of photovoice as a form of critical service learning. Connections to these standards are visible throughout this project, such as 1) engaging participants in service that is meaningfully relevant, 2) ongoing personal reflection to promote a deeper understanding of one's self and place in society, 3) promoting diversity and mutual respect among all participants, 4) providing opportunities for youth voice to be heard, and 5) forming mutually beneficial partnerships to address identified community needs.

In what follows, I discuss the types of data collected and data collection methods utilized through each phase of this project. Two categories of data were collected throughout the phases of this project. One category was data evidence not explicitly analyzed for this project but that allowed me to check my own biases and positionality throughout the project, check for, and maintain, the participant's understating of photovoice methods and understating of key concepts throughout the project, and provided me with an understanding of the ongoing power dynamics within the group to better facilitate insight and utilization of youth voice. This data evidence included student worksheets from the group training and reflection sessions and observation notes collected during these sessions. The other category of data collected was data directly analyzed to address the research questions posed through this study. That data included observation notes and student worksheets collected during training session one, transcriptions and student worksheets collected during the youth focus group session (to explore the participant

constructed dominant narrative surrounding themselves and their community), transcriptions of the photo elicitation interviews (to explore the narratives students construct about themselves and their community through their photo documentation), observation notes and student worksheets collected during the group reflection session, and the emergent themes collected during the group analysis session.

Observational data collected during each of these phases was analyzed as evidence for how photovoice as critical service learning may contribute to the construction of student narratives about themselves and their community. The actual student-selected photos were not explicitly analyzed but served the additional purpose of reinforcing the student-constructed narratives by providing supporting evidence of insights and understandings the youth participants may have had difficulty articulating during the actual interviews.

### **Phase One: Trainings and Focus Group<sup>2</sup>**

Phase one consisted of two 3-hour training sessions and one 2-hour focus group, scheduled prior to students taking photos.

- I. Training Session One (see Appendix C). Observation notes and student worksheets were collected and analyzed to determine what funds of knowledge and capital students already possessed regarding concepts such as critical service learning, social justice, community capital, deficit perspectives, etc. This analysis provided insight into students' perceptions of how the photovoice project as critical service learning differed from other critical service learning projects in which they have participated.
- II. Focus Group (see Appendix D). During the first weeks of the project, students participated in a youth focus group to share and discuss what others (those outside of

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<sup>2</sup> Following initial student/parent interest meeting and collection of consent/assent forms from those agreeing to participate in the study

their school and community) thought of them. This focus group allowed the participants to construct the dominant narrative surrounding them and their community. Focus Groups are a valuable data collection method for several reasons. According to Tracy (2013), focus groups serve as a way to gain valuable insight into emotions and experiences that might otherwise remain hidden, they allow for enhanced interaction and discussion with those sharing similar experiences, and serve to “raise participants’ consciousness about certain issues, or helping them learn new ways of seeing or talking about a situation” (p. 167). These reasons are all important when working with youth as they may be more susceptible to *group effect* (Carey, 1994), may benefit from having their experiences validated by others, and may feel empowered by being given the opportunity to express their views, thoughts, and feelings on issues important to them. During this focus group, three types of data were collected for analysis. 1) The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed. 2) Observation notes were collected to account for body language, positionality, and changes in mood and/or power dynamics. 3) Student worksheets used at the beginning of the session, serving as *probes*, were collected to provide greater context and understanding of the focus group discussion.

- III. Training Session Two (see Appendix E). Observation notes and student worksheets were collected. No data from training session two was explicitly analyzed for this project but was used for the purposes listed above.

**Phase Two: Photo Documentation** (see Appendix F).

Phase two consisted of students taking photographs during their own time over a four-week period with weekly 3-hour cooperative learning group sessions. Observation notes and

student worksheets were collected during the cooperative learning group sessions. No data from phase two was explicitly analyzed for this project but was used for the purposes listed above.

**Phase Three: Photo Elicitation Interviews** (see Appendix G).

Phase three consisted of students self-selecting 10 photographs from their collection that they felt best represented their story (narrative) and subsequently shared with me during an individual interview session using photo elicitation techniques. During the interview, participants were asked to provide meaning and context for their chosen photographs – a personal interpretation of their photo story or documentation. Although participants collaborated on emergent themes for their photo documentation during the weekly cooperative learning group sessions, each student’s interpretation of these themes and the photos took were unique, therefore it was valuable to gain insight into this interpretation on an individual basis through photo elicitation interviews.

Photo elicitation is the process of using images to elicit insights, memories, feelings, and interpretations in the context of qualitative interviewing (Collier, 1967; Warren and Karner, 2015). In using photo elicitation with urban youth, Stanczak (2007) notes that photo elicitation “is good at giving children agency because the images and explanations mainly come from the kids themselves” (p. 178). In this way, the photographs selected served to flesh out expanded lines of questioning and provided youth an alternate way to articulate sometimes difficult to communicate aspects of their lives, allowing for a deeper reflection “on related but indirect associations with the photographs themselves” (Stanczak, 2007, p. 192).

The photo elicitation interview process followed the SHOWeD model (originally developed by Wang & Burris, 1997, but adapted for use here from an earlier adaptation by Powers, Freedman, and Pitner, 2012). The SHOWeD model helps to guide students into

reflective responses without the pressure of *right* or *wrong* answers and is developmentally appropriate for interviews with youth. This questioning model is often used in photovoice methodology to elicit responses about deficits and injustices but, as data analysis for this project is framed through the lens of a possibility perspective, I chose to use this method as a way to elicit responses highlighting assets and strengths of self and community. The photo elicitation interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Although video recording of the interviews may seem like the obvious choice when working with visual images, audio recording allowed the participants (and me) to be more comfortable during the interview process. During the interview, I numbered the photos and used these number references when discussing individual photos with the participant as a way to keep track of the visuals being interpreted throughout the audio recordings when analyzing the data. Also of note, during interviews, I reserved the right to draw students' attention to photographs they took but perhaps did not select for elicitation if I determined said photographs were important to help students articulate their narratives in a more constructive way and/or to also guide the questioning in an open-ended format towards analytic concepts or previously discussed themes.

**Phase Four: Group Reflection Session** (see Appendix H).

Phase four consisted of a group reflection session, serving as a *de-brief* following the photo documentation process and individual interviews, which allowed students to share their individually constructed narratives with other members of the group. This session also served as a memory-invoking exercise in which several participants shared additional details about their photos that didn't come to light during the actual interviews. This session allowed students to reflect on the photovoice process thus far, discuss how the process impacted their ability to construct and share their narratives, and how this project (as critical service learning) was or was

not different – not just in methodology, but in outcomes, thoughts, perceptions, impacts - from other critical service learning projects they had completed. Observational, audio, and student worksheet data from this session was analyzed as evidence for 1) how photovoice as critical service learning contributed to the construction of student narratives about themselves and their community, and 2) insight into the emergent and identified themes for analysis.

**Phase Five: Group Analysis Session** (see Appendix I).

A final group session was held as an initial thematic analysis work session. Students analyzed their own and other's constructed narratives and began to code and sort for emergent themes. Next, those themes were discussed in the broader social context and what the results of this initial analysis may mean for the students and their community. Data was collected for analysis in the form of observation notes and student worksheets, which provided implicit and explicit insight and understanding of student-constructed emergent themes. This session was primarily for the students' benefit, to highlight their role as co-researchers and was not initially intended to be used for concrete analysis but rather as a way to compare student-derived themes to my own thematic analysis, in the hope of providing a richness and deeper understanding to what I may have overlooked during my own analysis and to the importance of insights not voiced during the interviewing process.

**Phase Six: Celebration.**

Student participants, parents/guardians, and photo subjects were invited to attend a small celebration reception to thank them for participating in this study. Students were awarded with certificates of completion and received a small token of appreciation for their efforts and commitment. NOTE: Although this is an important step in photovoice methodology, this step

was not part of the dissertation study. It was carried out independently of this project and, as such, it is beyond the purview of this dissertation.

### **Data Analysis**

The student-perceived dominant narrative constructed during the youth focus group session held at the start of the study, observation notes and student worksheets collected during the group reflection session, student-constructed narratives elicited through photo documentation and interview sessions, as well as the student-derived themes that emerged during the final collaborative analysis session served as data for analysis. Thematic data analysis was conducted through a possibility-perspectives framework with a focus on Dewey's notions of democratic education and Freire's ideology of critical consciousness for social change. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within data" (p. 79) and can be viewed as *inductive*, drawing on the participant's articulated experiences in a *bottom-up* approach that induces from the actual data, or *deductive*, a *top-down* approach that highlights insights that may not have been explicitly articulated by the participants but are instead interpreted through a theoretical framework familiar to the researcher. For this analysis, I used a combination of inductive and deductive analysis, notably drawing more heavily on deductive analysis. My research questions are both exploratory and experiential, within a critical framework, therefore my analysis was inductive as I looked at the narratives participants constructed without overriding the *stories* themselves and deductive as I drew on critical constructs such as Dewey's democratic education and Freire's critical consciousness approaches through the concepts of agency, capital, and belonging. By utilizing both deductive and inductive methods for this project, I assumed that *truth* can be constructed through language and interpretation of that *truth* is based on both experience and theory (Braun and Clark, 2012),

addressing “the content of meaning, as articulated through social interaction and as mediated by culture” (the why?), and emphasizing meaning through people’s constructed lived experiences (the how?) (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997, p. 14-15).

This project was intended to be iterative as it was designed to go back and forth between theory and the youth perspectives, respecting both the theoretical frames and youth voice. Although using both the theoretically based coding and what emerged from the initial analysis as a means to shape subsequent analytical decisions was my intent, it was much harder than I thought it would be for the two to interact. In the end, an inductive approach was taken in only two main areas of the analysis – an analysis of students’ sense of belonging and as a comparison of their student-derived themes to my own deductive analysis drawn from the critical constructs discussed above – agency, capital, and belonging. This is, in some ways, a limitation of this study as if I had foregrounded the nature of this dual point of departure as more of a grounded theory approach, it might have gotten the kids themes into play sooner in the analysis and resulted in more robust, or at the least different, findings. That said, I used the initial concepts of analysis, derived from my theoretical constructs, as my frames for analysis (deductive) yet what the kids said in the parallel process of their own thematicizing couldn’t be ignored so I chose to use their themes as a comparison to my own findings (inductive).

In regards to critical service learning, I view *agency* as students’ belief in their own ability to take action (and create change) arising from youth voice. This notion of agency cuts across both Deweyan and Freirean theoretical frames as it posits youth agency as a product of social and cultural constructs and the interests of the youth themselves. According to Stemhagen (2016b) a Deweyan view of education that starts with youth interests and nurtures these interests through connections to the curriculum will foster a recognition by the youth of their unique

knowledge and skills to act on the world (with a desire to do so) for change. He further posits, “an active, critical-thinking agent is at the heart of Dewey’s conception of learning” (p. 107). By taking a democratic approach to education, a space is opened to call attention to things that children might not independently see as significant, reinforcing the possibility that agency and ability are not independent of each other but rather relate to and reinforce each other (Stemhagen, 2016). In a more Freirean critical view, critical consciousness can serve “to help marginalized youth overcome the constraints on human agency or to serve as an ‘antidote’ to structural oppression” (Diemer & Li, 2011, p. 1815) by allowing students to *read* the injustices around them and act on those injustices. In a deficit-thinking system, it is sometimes challenging for students to highlight the strengths and assets of themselves and their community if they can’t first make sense of the injustices.

The concept of *capital* as an analytical frame is based on Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth discussed previously. Yosso highlights Franklin’s (2002) definition of cultural capital, “the sense of group consciousness and collective identity that serves as a resource aimed at the advancement of an entire group” (p. 177 as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 81) to emphasize the primary purpose of “identifying and documenting cultural wealth to transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their community” (p. 82). In the traditional deficit approach, value judgments are often placed on communities that already lack the resources provided to the privileged, setting the stage for the perpetuation of assumptions of deficiency and disadvantage. By applying a possibilities perspective lens, some of these often-assumed deficiencies become assets, strengths, and wealth to be fostered and learned from and the possibility for new narratives to be constructed becomes realized. Yosso (2005) identifies six

forms of cultural wealth (capital) utilized by marginalized groups and I will use these six categories as analytic frames for this concept. These are

- 1) Aspirational – the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of real and perceived barriers,
- 2) Navigational – skills for maneuvering through social institutions,
- 3) Social – networks of people and community resources,
- 4) Linguistic – the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style,
- 5) Familial – cultural knowledges nurtured among familia that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition, and
- 6) Resistant – knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality (Yosso, 2005, p. 77-81).

In light of Freire’s critical consciousness, these six forms of wealth can serve as recognition of oppression and motivation to enact transformative, justice-oriented change.

*Belonging* is a term I use to denote both a critical pedagogy of place (as outlined in the review of the literature) and the tension between individual identity and identity within the community (group dynamic). Gruenwald (2003) argues that students must recognize their own situationality, their context of place, in order to be empowered to make change within their own communities and that reflection of the connections between their cultural and environmental positions are necessary to critically understanding social issues that affect them and their community. By understanding this sense of place, students become more attuned to the root-causes on injustice and are better equipped to unlearn the dominate narratives surrounding the value of their capital and worth - not only to unlearn these narratives, but to construct new ones.

This also highlights Mumford's view of the Regional Survey (1938), as the tension between students' individual sense of identity (that which is in part informed by the often-limiting structural forces of schooling) and their identity within the group they call community (comprised of the specialized knowledges produced by a blending of historical and ecological constructs). By exploring *belonging*, I gained a better sense of students' perceptions of their own identity and their perceptions of identity within their community as it is hoped that when students are aware of their own *place*, both individual and collective action can occur.

It is important to acknowledge these as initial frames of analysis, recognizing that the student-constructed narratives and student-derived themes determined the final frames of analysis. It is also important to acknowledge that through this analysis, I did not try to determine *if* spaces or *how* spaces were created. What I garnered from this study is that the act of participating in photovoice as critical service learning *is* the space and now that the space has been created (regardless of its size, nature, etc.), the constructed narratives can circulate and future research can study the broader effects.

The interviews were transcribed orthographically (reproducing all spoken words and sounds), and I took both a naturalized and denaturalized approach to transcription (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Davidson, 2009; Bucholtz, 2000). Oliver, Serovich, & Mason (2005) describe a naturalized approach as "language represents the real world" and a denaturalized approach as "within speech are meanings and perceptions that construct our reality" (p. 1274). It is valuable to be transparent here about this approach as

what is represented in the transcript (e.g., talk, time, nonverbal actions, speaker/hearer relationships, physical orientation, multiple languages, translations); who is representing whom, in what ways, for what purpose, and with what outcome; and how analysts

position themselves and their participants in their representations of form, content, and action. (Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997, p. 173)

shaped my meaning-making throughout this analysis. This transparency also served to address power-differentials, experiential realities, and representation inherent in this meaning-making (Davidson, 2009). I also want to be clear about my coding methods when looking for themes. I used Saldana's concept coding methods as outlined in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (2015) as a guide. Concept codes assign "macro levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress (e.g., a series of codes or categories" (p. 119). Through concept coding, I looked for words or phrases that 1) represented a *bigger picture* meaning or idea, and 2) represented observable processes that added up to broader schemes. According to Saldana (2015), concept coding is valuable to critical theory projects as "it stimulates reflection on broader social constructs" (p. 120) and is useful for those working with varied data types such as photographs, transcripts, and field notes. It also seems useful when working with youth, as they may not be able to concretely articulate their thoughts and meanings regarding abstract concepts such as identity, community, and culture. Concept coding allowed me to make meaning from the words and phrases of the students and apply those meanings to both the resulting theoretical concepts and emergent concepts. Throughout this project, I looked for concepts that highlighted agency, capital, and belonging as discussed above.

What follows is a summary of the data collected for analysis with a description of analysis methods used for each applicable phase of this project.

Observation and student worksheet data obtained during training session one: I categorized, sorted, and coded this data to determine what specialized knowledge and capital students brought to the project based on other critical service learning projects they had participated in previously.

This analysis helped me to further analyze the data collected during the student reflection session later in the project to gain a deeper understanding of how photovoice as critical service learning enhanced the experience and outcomes as opposed to critical service learning alone.

Student-perceived dominant narrative constructed during the youth focus group session: I first constructed categories from this data based on the deficit-thinking perspectives discussed in chapter two. From these categories, I sorted and coded the data into themes relevant to the research questions. For example, themes that emerged as a result of students' perceptions of what others thought of them and their community. This analysis allowed me to provide context and meaning for alternative or *counter* narratives that emerged through analysis of subsequent student-constructed narratives.

Student-constructed narratives elicited during individual interview sessions: The individual photo elicitation interview data was transcribed and then categorized, sorted and coded into themes based on the critical theory approaches outlined in chapter two and framed within a possibility perspective. Dewey's democratic education and Freire's critical consciousness approaches served as the main lens for analysis in relation to my research questions. I looked for emergent themes within the students' narratives related to students' sense of identity, sense of community, and sense of place within their community, focusing on those themes that highlighted strengths and assets (possibility-perspective), relation to education for democracy, and students' ability to be change agents in their community (critical consciousness).

Observational data from group reflection session: Data collected from this session was analyzed by first sorting into categories and then coding into themes to produce evidence for how photovoice as critical service learning contributed to the construction of student narratives about themselves and their community (research question three), offered greater insight into the

photovoice process in action (as opposed to theory), and how the process impacted students' ability to construct and share these narratives. This analysis was viewed through the literature on critical service learning outcomes and photovoice as critical pedagogy. I also looked for themes related to democratic education, as Roberts (2012) notes, "To Dewey, democracy becomes lived through the interrelationships and interdependence of social relations bound together by experiences – both individual and collective" (p. 60) and in *Experience and Education*, Dewey himself insists on the "intimate and necessary relation between the processes of actual experience and education" (Dewey, 1938, p. 20). The analysis of this observational data provided deeper meaning and insight into the student-constructed narratives through their own reflections as I was able to *see* details about the students' photos that did not come to light during analysis of the photo-elicitation interview transcriptions (adding further evidence for research questions one and two).

Student-derived themes that emerged during the final collaborative analysis session: During this session, the youth participants conducted thematic analysis of the actual photos selected by themselves and others for the photo elicitation interviews - the photos they selected to best tell their story. They used an activity worksheet to guide their analysis, which consisted of sorting and coding into themes (see Appendix I). I served as a facilitator only during this portion of data analysis. By conducting their own thematic analysis, the process served to support participants as co-researchers in the process. As Delgado (2015) notes, the "participatory nature of photovoice analysis is one of the key elements in making this arts-based method appeal to groups that are marginalized" (p. 136). He further states, "youth have insights into their lives that adults simply do not have" (p. 12) and I feel it is important for researchers to listen and respond to urban youth's perceptions of their own lives and communities, especially when the

researcher's own background may be very different from the youth with whom they are working.

By allowing youth participants to identify themes from their own documentation and narratives, youth voice takes a prominent stance in this study. Through this process, “the participants distance themselves somewhat from embodied experience, taking on the role of contemplative “quasi-outsider”<sup>3</sup>, which in turn, invites deeper reflection and more meaningful interpretation...This deep reflection is indicative of the innovative approach of photovoice upon which its validity in research with young people rests” (Delgado, 2015, p. 137). In the initial data analysis, I looked at how the students' narratives and experiences related to my initial analytic themes, yet, in a second phase of data analysis, I looked more closely at the student-derived themes to make meaning from them through the theoretical frameworks outlined previously. I specifically looked at their themes in relation to how they were tied to a possibility perspective model, critical consciousness, and democratic education, but also how their interpretation of the data lent itself to the broader focus of how photovoice as critical service learning may lead to the construction of counter narratives by marginalized groups and what this may mean for the students and their community. As Jay (2005) notes:

Beyond a mere political arrangement, democracy also has social and moral dimensions....to further this cause, Dewey argued, education for democracy was an absolute necessity. Such education must be based on experiential rather than book learning, creative investigation rather than rote memory, and a transactional relationship between a child and environment rather than a passive, spectatorial one. (p. 296)

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<sup>3</sup> The term “quasi-outsider” is attributed to Brown & Powell, 2012, p. 139 by Delgado, 2015.

## Credibility of Data

Internal validity addresses how closely research findings match *reality* (Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, internal validity is what Lincoln and Guba (1985) have termed *credibility*. Credibility allows the researcher (and those viewing the research) to take into account that data does not stand alone as there is always an interpreter, that *reality* is altered in some way when we research it, and that the data collected is just a representation of *reality* from some perspective, not from a universal truth (Ratcliffe, 1983). As any data collected will not really capture a universal reality, Maxwell (2005) states that validity “has to be assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research, rather than being a context-independent property of methods or conclusions” (p. 105). To address the issue of credibility, I employed member checking, memoing, and triangulation techniques.

Three types of validity (credibility) can be addressed through member-checking. *Descriptive* validity is addressed when participants are asked if the researcher accurately portrayed their experiences; *Interpretive* validity is addressed when participants gauge whether the researcher fully captured the meanings behind the data; and *theoretical* validity is addressed when the participants view the interpretive meaning of the data, derived by the researcher, as representing them justly (Maxwell, 1992). Through this study, I addressed all three types of validity by embedding member-checking into all phases of the photovoice project (as outlined in Data Collection). For example, participants had opportunities to share further insight into meaning and understanding by completing worksheets and knowledge measures on concepts covered during the training and cooperative learning group sessions, constructing and interpreting narratives through photo documentation and photo elicitation, and through multiple, ongoing opportunities for reflection and discussion.

Memoing is the process of the researcher recording notes about what they are learning from the data through reflection. These notes, or memos, serve as written records during analysis for the researcher to track their own hypothesis, ideas, and notions about categories/themes and their relationship to one another. Memoing also helps “the researcher achieve analytical distance from the raw data and force the researcher to conceptualize” (Groenewald, 2008, p. 506). This action reinforces credibility as it provides a record of the researcher’s meaning-making process while analyzing the data. The process of data sorting is described by Groenewald (2008) as “building a puzzle without a picture” and memoing can benefit the researcher greatly in this regard. To address credibility at both the textual and conceptual levels of data analysis, I used both theoretical and operational memoing techniques. Theoretical memoing allowed me to fit the puzzle pieces together by deriving meaning from the data. Operational memoing, jotting down notes, reminders, or critiques as analysis occurs, further helped me to make connections between concepts and categories. Additionally, these memoing techniques allowed me to more deeply reflect on my role throughout this project to better understand and remain transparent about my objectivity/subjectivity. The memos served the purpose of providing an on-going record of how photovoice works as critical service learning – how is it different from critical service learning? How is it similar? How does the addition of photovoice impact the interactions and outcomes? I have facilitated many critical service learning projects with these students so having memos to reflect on the process as it is ongoing was valuable to gaining new insights and knowledge.

Triangulation is another commonly used method to address validity in qualitative studies. Triangulation is effective when the phenomena being studied is best understood through a variety of data sources and/or the use of multiple theories to confirm emerging themes. This

allows for the reduction of bias from only using one source of data for inquiry and allows researchers to understand the different dimensions of the data collected in relation to the purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009; Rothbauer, 2008). As the name suggests, triangulation involves the use of at least three differing points from which to view the data. For this study, the use of observation notes, student reflections on the photo documentation process and the photos themselves, and transcriptions of the youth focus group and photo elicitation interviews served as a basis for triangulation.

### **Researcher's Role**

Perhaps the closest fit for my role in this project is the nascent category of *collaborative partner* in which the role of the researcher is related to all complex levels of this project, a blending of *observer as participant* and *participant as observer*.

Merriam (2009), states that the observer as participant role is one in which, “the researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer” (p. 124) and the participant as observer role is viewed by Adler and Adler (1998) as one in which the researcher is “involved in the setting’s central activities, assuming responsibilities that advance the group, but without fully committing themselves to members’ values and goals” (p. 85). This study blurs these categories. As detailed in the *Settings and Participants* section above, I have been ingrained in this community and the participants’ lives for a number of years. I have insider knowledge about their backgrounds, culture, and views of the world, yet I am also, in some respects, viewed as an outsider. For this study, I was part participant (the teacher, the facilitator, the mentor) and part researcher (the observer, the interviewer, and the analyzer). According to Merriam (2009), the defining characteristic of the collaborative partner role “is that the researcher and the participants are

equal partners in the research process” (p. 125) and although the participants are not fully equal in terms of defining the problem and writing the findings, equality is transparent throughout the data collection and analysis stages. Participants have voice in what to document through their photographs and what narratives they construct through these images. They also have agency in defining the themes that emerge from their research.

In community-based and participatory action models of research (photovoice as one such model), the collaborative partner role breaks down the traditional hierarchies of power between the participants and the researcher as they are working together towards a shared goal (McGinn, 2008). This role also serves to enhance the quality of data collection and analysis as DeWalt and DeWalt (2011) point out:

Living, working, laughing, and crying with the people that one is trying to understand provides a sense of the self and the other that is not easily put into words. It is a tacit understanding that informs the form of research, the specific techniques of data collection, the recording of information, and the subsequent interpretation of materials collected. (p. 10)

As the literature also suggests, this role makes it “difficult to attend to level of detail necessary to gain new insight” (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2011, p. 88) and to address this issue, I made certain that throughout this study (in my observation notes particularly), I looked closely for new insights, contradictory material, and have striven to seek out new explanations for phenomena that were familiar to me. Those working extensively with Youth Participatory Research (YPR) make it clear that issues of power and authority, as well as tensions resulting from constantly switching between full active participant and observer/note taker, can be a challenge (Bertrand, 2012; Baldrige, 2012). To address these challenges, memoing was valuable as it allowed me to

reflect on my role and positionality throughout the process while maintaining an equitable balance between researcher and participant, limiting the influence of power hierarchies and role-switching tensions.

### **Limitations**

The limitations discussed in this section relate specifically to photovoice methodology. Although there are limitations to certain data collection and data analysis methods, as well as the researcher's role, I have addressed those in the preceding sections. Here, I will briefly address limitations found in the literature regarding the use of photovoice with youth and the potential ethical dilemmas presented by photovoice in general. In previous sections, I have detailed several safeguards that will address some limitations in working with youth, positionality, and ethical concerns, but what follows is a discussion of additional limitations that have not been fully safeguarded against through these provisions based on the scope of this project.

Gant, Shimshock, Allen-Meares, Smith, Miller, Hollingsworth, and Shanks (2009) found that photovoice participants over the age of 18 benefited more than younger participants in their study conducted with urban youth. They also note that their findings align with previous research stating that critical thinking about community issues (as in photovoice methodology) may require cognitive abilities exhibited in late adolescence/young adulthood. Drew, Duncan, and Sawyer (2010) also address this issue by stating, photovoice “methods must remain flexible to suit a range of development-related capacities for personal reflection and articulation of complex thoughts” (p. 1678). Jardine and James (2012) note the potential for *response bias* in their findings when conducting photovoice research with youth. They surmise that youth may be more inclined to give the researcher an *acceptable* answer (the answer they think the facilitator wants to hear) than their own interpretation. Drew, et al. (2009) note that it is important to

design photovoice projects in a way that “subvert traditional adult-child hierarchies” (p. 1678). This serves to ensure that youth have a mutual space to share their thoughts and the trust to share these thoughts freely. In addition, one practical limitation that I personally encountered in conducting photovoice with youth is the fact that middle school students do not drive and the scheduling and time commitment for these participants was dependent on their caregiver’s transportation availability and schedule. There were several times throughout the data collection process that students were late to arrive or early to leave a group session (or were unable to attend at all) due to an unanticipated parental scheduling conflict.

Another limiting factor when conducting photovoice is the fact that participants are given cameras to document realities within their community. This poses two dilemmas. One, the cameras may pose an increased risk to participants regarding theft. Two, documentation of community may involve participants taking pictures of persons or places deemed *unsafe*. Although students received training on the ethical and practical use of cameras and taking photos, I could not fully guard against their judgment in deeming what is *acceptable* or *safe*. The types of pictures taken could have raised concerns regarding the reinforcement of negative stereotypes or the *misrepresentation* of subjects and locations (Delgado, 2015) but fortunately, this was not an issue and did not arise during this study.

### **Conclusion**

In the preceding chapter, I have discussed in detail my methodology including research design, setting and population, data collection procedures, the analysis process, my role, and limitations. In the chapter that follows, I present my findings and share resulting the students’ narratives as they were presented to me. Of course, my understanding of all that is in play here influences this presentation of student narratives. It is my hope that this is a dynamic tension that

will add depth and richness to the project as a whole. I provide a summary of methods, an overview of analysis, and my rationale for the presentation of results, followed by the students' narratives themselves and a summary of the findings.

## **Chapter Four**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

When designing this study, I hoped that by choosing to use an adapted version of photovoice, I would be able to provide students with a space to reflect on and recognize what's right instead of focusing on what's wrong, as a way to move beyond deficit-thinking. Although the literature supported this choice, I had some doubts that perhaps it was too leading. My thoughts kept circulating around the notion that, of course students would create narratives of possibility if they were only tasked with taking pictures of the strengths and assets of themselves, their school, their community and their abilities. While participating in the process with the students, it became clearer that yes, this method was promoting a possibilities perspective (by design) but it also created discursive spaces for all types of student narratives to be realized, even those that reinforced deficit-thinking.

As we were working through the process, one of the first activities we did as a group was to create lists on large sheets of notepaper. I asked students to write, in one column, all of the negative things they had felt, witnessed, experienced, or heard about people like them, students like them, their school, their community, and in general, students' abilities to be change-makers. The list quickly filled up, column after column, even needing additional large sheets of paper. They had no trouble identifying the negatives, however, in the next column, they were asked to walk up and list strengths and assets, or the good things, about themselves and the various other categories, and they struggled and hesitated. After half an hour or so, their lists for this column

were significantly shorter. So, we came back together and I shared, “I know you, I know your school and your community, and I know there are really great things about you and great things going on here. There’s some really good things you’ve said to me that you wished people would recognize, but you are having a really hard time writing those down for me.”

This conversation with the students really brought the literature home. I felt that I was seeing first-hand the internalization of deficit-thinking, as these students were quick to point out the injustices, but struggled to find the possibilities, even when given the space to do so. The eye-opening moment for me was that it took guidance, facilitation, and thoughtful, reflective questioning for them to be able to open up and to feel comfortable in recognizing their own strengths and assets, those of the people around them, and the place they call home. For me, my claim that photovoice in this adaptation is an effective method for helping to create those spaces had been justified in that moment. The findings in this chapter are a description of the types of narratives students construct about themselves and their community, their sense of belonging within their community, their perceived ability to be change-agents and how this form of photovoice opened up a discursive space for these student narratives to be constructed and shared.

### **Summary of Methods**

Very early in the project, I held a focus group with the student participants prior to them taking any pictures. The purpose of this focus group was to elicit student-perceived dominant narratives surrounding their identity, their school, their community, and their ability to be change-makers. At the beginning of the focus group, students were asked to complete a simple reflection exercise by answering a series of five questions. They were asked to list what they thought others thought about them as a person, as a student, their school, their community, and

their ability to be change-makers. In order to complete the activity, they first needed to define others. I felt it was important to allow the students the freedom and space to define others as they saw fit so I only served as a facilitator for this discussion, placing no parameters on their ideas or thoughts.

After much debate, the students decided that the *others* were people or a group of people who do not live in their community and do not attend their school. They gave examples of others as people who live somewhere else in the city, kids that go to a different school, or people who don't know anything about their school or community and haven't been to their school, met any of them, nor met their families. I was surprised that they did not include race, gender, or class as criteria for others (yet these attributes often came up in the discussions that followed). Although this is a very broad, general definition, it served as a self-generated guide for the students when thinking about and discussing how others might view them and their abilities.

As somewhat of an insider and an outsider (as discussed previously in Chapter 3), I had my own thoughts about the dominant narrative surrounding these students and their community but this focus group was about them and their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings so I offered no knowledge or assertions of my own but rather just listened to how they perceived the thoughts and feelings of others, interjecting only for clarification.

During the following six weeks, students took pictures to represent the strengths and assets of self as an individual, self as student, their school, their community, and their ability to be a change-maker. Students were provided training on photo ethics, safety, and how to use their cameras but the selection of the photos themselves, what they chose to take photos of, was completely up to the individual student. The categories listed above were used as a guide to help students focus their photo-taking efforts while allowing for creative, personal representation.

During the photo-taking process, I met with students each week to provide an opportunity for them to share their photos and help each other articulate their representations and interpretations of how their individual photos *fit* within each broad category.

After students had taken all of their photos, they were asked to select 10 photos (two from each category) to best tell their story. I then met with each student individually over the course of four weeks for photo elicitation interviews. During the individual interview, I asked each student a series of questions to help them elicit their stories from the photographs they selected. The interview questions were based on the SHOWeD model outlined in more detail in the previous chapter. Students were asked to describe the photo, discuss how the photo made them feel, share the *unseen* story and why they selected that photo to represent the strength or asset of the particular category being discussed (while specifically identifying that strength or asset), where they think that strength comes from, and how the photo could educate *others* about them, their school, their community, and their ability to make a difference.

Following the interviews, students met as a group to conduct an initial thematic analysis of their stories. Students participated in an activity in which they split into small groups and went through each of their photos, sharing their interpretations and representations with each other. Next, they used a color-coding system to sort the data into codes, i.e., similar words, phrases, meanings based on perceived strengths and assets of self, school, community, and their abilities to be change-makers (see Appendix I). Once each small group had completed this coding process, the whole group reconvened and students analyzed all of the worksheets by writing the codes on a large whiteboard organized by the category colors from their sheets. Once all of the codes were sorted and organized on the board, the group began to pick out similarities in meaning based on shared discussion of individual context and intent. The students devised a

system of placing symbols next to words or phrases with similar meaning (even if the words or phrases were different). Once this process was completed, they derived main themes from their data (see Figure 1). These themes were not used as stand-alone data but were rather used to offer insight into my analysis and have much to offer the discussion. A description of the ways in which these themes both jibe and conflict with the three predetermined analytic themes of agency, capital, and belonging is discussed in more detail in the Summary of Findings at the end of this chapter.

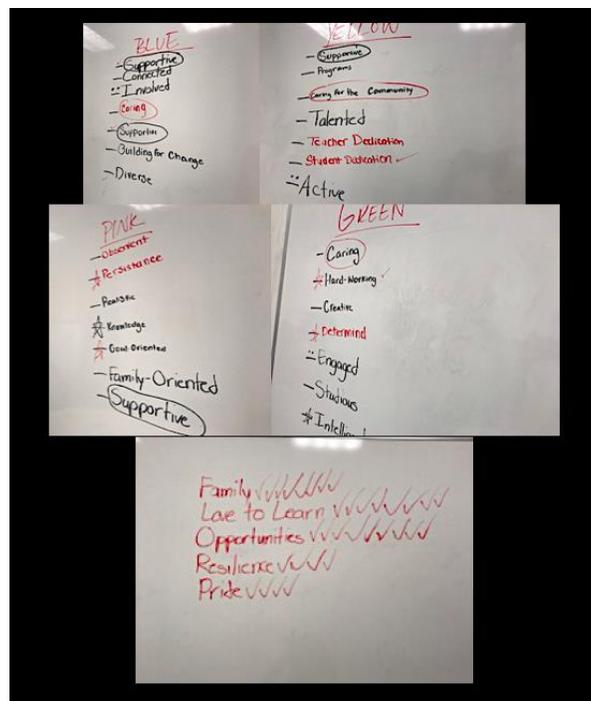


Figure 1. Students' Thematic Analysis

The final group session of the study was a reflection session in which students discussed their photos, their stories, reflected on the photovoice process, and shared ideas for the future of their photovoice project beyond this study. This session was informal and less structured than previous sessions, yet it provided valuable data for not only the effectiveness of photovoice as a way to create discursive spaces that allow student-constructed narratives to be realized and heard, but also for the argument that photovoice as a process is a form of critical service

learning, not just a research methodology - the act of taking photographs as a space for constructing narratives of possibility, as opposed to a method for conducting research about those spaces.

### **Overview of Analysis**

Once the data had been collected and audio recorded sessions transcribed, I began the analysis, as detailed in Chapter 3. I selected the three initial analytic frames of agency, capital, and belonging as a starting point for my analysis as these themes emphasize the critical constructs of democratic education and critical consciousness, which are the theoretical foundations of this study. Agency, capital, and belonging coincide with a possibilities-perspective framework and allow me to view the data through an interpretation of students' perceptions based on both experience and theory, as this project is "concerned with increasing the capabilities (self-efficacy) of individuals to participate in the democratic process (political awareness and action)" (Itin, 1999, p. 93). What follows is an overview of how I sorted, coded, and derived themes during the analysis process.

To address the narratives of identity, community, and ability to be a change-maker, I first sorted the photo elicitation interview data into the categories of self, self as student, school, community, and ability to be a change-maker. This sorting process included taking the transcribed interview data from each individual student and grouping the interviews into large segments based on these categories – i.e., all of the individual student statements regarding strengths and assets of self were copied from the original transcriptions and placed together in one single document and then the same was done for each of the remaining four categories. After I had compiled the five category documents, I highlighted (coded) all of the words and

phrases noted by the students that explicitly or implicitly represented strengths and assets (concepts) – these *strengths* became my concept codes.

I then created a table with the categories of self, self as student, school, community, and ability to be a change-agent listed down column one and the analytic themes of agency, capital, and belonging listed along the top row. For each category, I sorted my concept codes into each of the themes. For those codes listed more than once, I initially listed them as many times as they were denoted by students but then went back and only listed each one once per theme in the table, with the number of times addressed by students noted in parenthesis after the code (see Table 1). Although the same words or phrasings may have been used to represent a similar strength or asset in a particular category and therefore coded the same, this did not necessarily mean that those codes were placed under the same theme. For example, several students stated that pride was a strength of self as student but the meanings were different based on the context provided by their full narratives– some were proud of their academic accomplishments and ability to do well in school (agency) and some meant that they had school spirit or pride (belonging).

Research Question #	Category	AGENCY (Strengths)	CAPITAL (Strengths)	BELONGING (Strengths)
1	Self (Identity)	Uniqueness (1) <b>Perseverance (1)</b> <b>Pride (2)</b> Responsibility (1) Creativity (1) <b>Caring (2)</b>	Determination (1) Optimism (1) <b>Positivity (4)</b> <b>Perseverance (2)</b> Creativity (1) Family values (1)	Uniqueness (1) <b>Pride (1)</b> <b>Caring (1)</b> Family values (1)
1	Self as Student (Identity)	<b>Hard-working/work ethic (2)</b> <b>Love of Learning (3)</b> <b>Pride (1)</b> <b>Good Reader (3)</b> Creativity (1) Mindfulness/Self-awareness (1) Curiosity (1) <b>Organization (3)</b>	<b>Hard-working/work ethic (2)</b> <b>Love of Learning (1)</b> Confidence (1) Motivation (1) Ambition (1)	<b>Pride (2)</b> Motivation (1) <b>Love of Learning (2)</b> Confidence (1)
1	School (Community)	<b>Diversity (1)</b> <b>Engagement (2)</b>	<b>Programs Offered (4)</b> <b>Diversity (2)</b> Library/Resources (1) Dedication (1)	<b>Strong Music Dept (3)</b> <b>Diversity (1)</b> <b>Caring (2)</b> Library (1) Pride (1)
1	Community	<b>Strength (2)</b> <b>Supportive (1)</b>	<b>Strength (2)</b> <b>Supportive (1)</b> <b>Diversity (1)</b> <b>Opportunity (2)</b> Inspiring (1) Positivity (1) Resources (1) Perseverance (1)	<b>Supportive (3)</b> <b>Welcoming (2)</b> <b>Diversity (2)</b> Caring (1) Safety (1) Resources (1)
2	Ability to be Change-Agent	<b>Positivity (2)</b> Determination (1) Empowered (1) Confident (1) <b>Caring (1)</b> Inspiring (1) Persistence (1) Brave (1)	Community Service/Volunteering (1) <b>Caring (1)</b> Family (1)	Awareness (1) Knowledge (1) Think outside the box/Creative (1) Problem-solver (1) Leadership skills (1)

Research question #1 specifically asks about the narratives of self and community and I felt it was important to break these down during the interview process. Due to the often-conflicting nature of schooling vs. the nature of home and society (Ballantine & Hammack, 2015), students may think of identity in dualistic terms.... who they are outside of school and who they are expected to be within the institution. To address this, I chose to separate *identity* into identity of self and identity of self as student to help students better understand (and possibly

better articulate) their thoughts surrounding this dual identity. Community is multifaceted in nature including, among other things, the geographic areas in which children live in as well as the schools they attend (Clark, 2007). I firmly believe that schools are (or should be) a cornerstone of a community in both physical and social proximity, and many of the attributes we use to define *community* outside of the geographic are represented within the walls of the school institution. As Redding (1991) notes,

The school is often discussed in terms of its relationship to the community, suggesting that the school is something apart from community. In fact, the school exists within a mosaic of overlapping communities and is, itself, capable of functioning as a community. A community is a group of people associated with one another who share common values. Geography does not make community, nor does membership nor casual affiliation. When the school functions as a community rather than in a community, its constituents (students, parents, teachers, staff) associate with one another and share common values about the education of children. (p. 9)

Although they were separated into different categories during data collection and analysis, I report the findings from these categories as *identity* and *community* (singularly) in light of the research question. Although the findings for question #1 address multiple facets of self and community as this was a much broader question than the others, the responses elicited from students for the categories represented by question #1 also served to inform the findings for other questions.

To address the narratives of sense of place within the community, it is important to disclose that I didn't ask students a specific question related to their sense of place within their community during the elicitation interviews as I felt *sense of place* is too abstract of a concept

for youth to readily understand. The analysis for this portion of research question #1 comes from my concept coding and inductive thematic analysis of student's statements given during various parts of their overall interview sessions instead of concept codes derived from individual categories, specifically in relation to the theoretical frame of belonging as it relates to a critical pedagogy of place as discussed in Chapter 2.

To address research question #3, I analyzed observation and memo data derived during weekly student work and reflection sessions, primarily drawing from the final group reflection session in which students shared their overall thoughts on the photovoice process. During the final reflection session, students were given a list of questions related to the study and asked to discuss as a group. The questions were:

- 1) How has the photovoice project been different from other critical service learning projects you've worked on? What was different? What was the same?
- 2) How has this project influenced you and your views of yourself and your community?
- 3) Did the photovoice process help you *tell your story*? How?

I observed the student discussion (it was not recorded) and took notes as they shared their thoughts and reflections. I also went back through my previous observation notes taken during various activities and pulled out excerpts spotlighting photovoice as a form of critical service learning and/or photovoice use in the construction of student narratives. These codes were then organized into the themes of agency, capital, and belonging following the same process outlined above for research question #1 (see Table 2).

Table 2 <i>Thematic Analysis of Final Reflection Session Data</i>			
Research Question #3	AGENCY	CAPITAL	BELONGING
PHOTOVOICE AS CSL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Promoted student voice</li> <li>- Student-led</li> <li>- Freedom to tell own story</li> <li>- Photos provided 'broader' voice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognition of misperceptions and assumptions</li> <li>- Recognition of why assumptions and stereotypes occur</li> <li>- Learned research skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ability to share and collaborate</li> <li>- Awareness of strengths of community</li> </ul>
CONSTRUCTION OF NARRATIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focus on story of self</li> <li>- Empowering</li> <li>- Use of creativity</li> <li>- Realization of personal skills and assets</li> <li>- Pictures tell a story that words cannot</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learned teamwork skills</li> <li>- Awareness of social issues</li> <li>- Gained communication skills</li> <li>- Awareness of self as change-maker</li> <li>- Increased confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recognition of community assets</li> <li>- Appreciation of family and support systems</li> <li>- Pride in self and community</li> <li>- Appreciation of and respect for community</li> </ul>

### **Presentation of Findings**

As it would be impractical and inefficient to detail every story told from every photograph taken, interview transcribed, and group session observed, I have chosen to present the findings organized first by the findings of the focus group in which students shared their perceptions of the dominant narrative surrounding themselves and their community. Following the focus group findings, I next present the findings of the research questions, including both direct quotations from the students as well as my own synthesis of the analyzed data to honor the youth's voices while still respecting the analytic frames, as outlined in Chapter 3. Based on a review of findings presented in other qualitative studies using photovoice methods, there is precedent for communicating my findings in this way (Desyllas, 2010; Ortega, 2013; and Imasiku, 2014). In presenting the findings from her photovoice study, *Visions and Voices*, Desyllas (2010) sums up my own thoughts on the presentation of findings, "while the themes

organizing the women's photographs in this chapter are a result of my analysis and of their analyses, words and art, I am mindful of my analytic voice and its potential to overshadow the artists' verbal and visual representation of themselves, their lives, their needs and aspirations" (p. 173). Imasiku (2014) also notes, "consideration has been made to ensure that the voices of a group of vulnerable youth who are generally underrepresented in research have been heard and that the voice of the researcher is only second to that youth voice" (p. 189).

The photographs and student stories shared in this section were selected because I felt they best articulated the messages of possibility (strengths and assets) students were trying to convey and best represented the initial analytic frames of agency, capital, and belonging from a resource-based perspective. Although certain photographs may have been used as a better visual to highlight particular strengths and assets within a specific category and/or analytic frame, photographs that contain self-images have not been shared here to protect student privacy. In light of youth voice and equal representation, I also felt it was important to give each student the opportunity to be *heard* throughout this text, therefore, I selected student photos and narratives that I felt best highlighted the dominant themes from each category and then I created a table to track the number of photographs by each student represented within the text. Through this process, I made every effort to allow for equal representation, as out of 70 photographs and stories shared, each participant had at least three, and no more than five, photographs featured (see Table 3).

Participant	Student Photographs Represented in Text				
Olivia	Fig. 5	Fig. 10	Fig. 12	Fig. 23	
Izzy	Fig. 9	Fig. 17	Fig. 19	Fig. 26	Fig. 28
Jazmyn	Fig. 2	Fig. 11	Fig. 15	Fig. 21	
Rose	Fig. 4	Fig. 8	Fig. 18	Fig. 25	Fig. 27
Pete	Fig. 3	Fig. 16	Fig. 20	Fig. 31	
Liam	Fig. 7	Fig. 13	Fig. 29		
Bella	Fig. 6	Fig. 14	Fig. 22	Fig. 30	

Student pseudonyms have been used throughout the findings and discussion and student quotations provided throughout these chapters have not been edited. Direct student quotations have been left exactly as stated during the focus group, photo elicitation interviews, and reflection session to ensure authentic student voice. I have also made every effort to distinguish my own thoughts and statements from those of the student participants for increased credibility. The photos depicted here (and all photos shared and/or discussed throughout this project) are the students' own. I have not edited or adapted them in any way (other than to format in-text). Each student took their photos with the cameras provided at the start of the study and individually uploaded their own photos to a secure shared drive for dissemination within this text.

In the following section, focus group findings are presented based on themes relative to each of the five prompts provided to students (what they perceive others think of them and their community), supported by direct student quotes and my own summarization of student statements and reactions.

The student-constructed narratives elicited during the photo interviews provide findings for research questions # 1 and #2:

- What narratives do students construct about their identity, their community, and their sense of place within their community through participation in a photovoice critical service-learning project?
- What narratives do students construct about their ability to be change agents in their community through participation in a photovoice critical service-learning project?

Analyzed data from the weekly and final reflection sessions provide findings for research question #3:

- How, in particular, does photovoice as critical service learning contribute to the construction of student narratives about themselves and their community?

The initial analytic frames of agency, capital, and belonging were selected, in part, because they encapsulate parts of Dewey's democratic education, Freire's critical consciousness, and Gruenwald's critical pedagogy of place/Mumford's regional survey that I argue are important for critical, place-based service learning, youth voice, and community action. These frames serve as touchstones to stand in for the complicated, rich, and important literature and theoretical underpinnings of this project. Dewey and Freire have slightly different takes on agency, but as an analytic frame, it highlights both of their beliefs as this understanding of agency places youth agency as a product of social and cultural constructs and the interests and perceptions of the youth themselves. Capital may be seen as more Freirean than Deweyan, but Dewey recognized the power of the smaller publics to which we belong, the power of potential and Freire's ideas are central here, as he posits capital as the knowledge and skills gained through experience to be used as power for transformation. Belonging is interpreted as capital

that comes from the groups to which you belong as well as your own situationality. Both Gruenwald and Mumford highlight sense of place as the connections between cultural and environmental positions and individual identity. Although the analytic frames of agency, capital, and belonging are briefly addressed in this section, a more in-depth discussion of how these findings, and what wasn't addressed by either the students or myself in the findings, are relevant to the overall theoretical and conceptual frames will be shared further on. It is also important to disclose here that throughout the data collection and analysis process, I felt a distinct tension regarding my role in this process. Due to my relationship with these students and my place within this community, I feared that I was interpreting the students' stories through rose-colored glasses by not paying enough attention to my relationship with the students and how this history may influence them to say what they thought I wanted to hear. Although I had addressed this in my research design through member checking, memoing, and triangulation techniques, and I continuously tried to reinforce with the students (and myself) that I was here to observe and share their *truths* as they perceived them, no right or wrong answers, I felt this tension throughout. For this reason, the findings may at first appear to be skewed towards the confirmatory as I wanted to *do right* by these students and they wanted to *do right* by me, too. I have experienced their strengths, I am aware of their assets, and therefore, I struggled to move away from the self-affirming and view the process from a critical lens. The findings reported below highlight the possibility-perspective, as that was the purpose of this project, but after a more reflective, critical analysis of the process and findings, the undercurrents of marginalization and structural inequality are still present. I am fully aware that my history with the students, my own positionality, and a desire to see the project survive within a greater context limited my state of mind for a truly critical approach to data collection and analysis. For these reasons, I have

made efforts to be transparent in recognition of when my initial frames are called in to question or problematized by some of what the students said. In the sections that follow, I have made efforts to point out tensions, conflicts, and contradictions within the student narratives and within my own interpretations and synthesis. Although you will see these tensions shared throughout, I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 5.

## **Focus Group**

### **What Others Think: The Student-perceived Dominant Narrative**

I was once told, many years ago as a new teacher, that I needed to pay attention to what students think, not just what I know. In the spirit of that advice, I didn't try to study the objective version of the dominant narrative but instead what the kids perceive it to be, also in keeping with the literature on youth voice and participatory research. The following narrative may not be the recognized or accepted narrative of the community, the school or school division, or even myself and others, but it is theirs, and it deserves to be recognized as the dominant narrative for the purposes of this project. These students were honest, heartfelt, and reflective during the activity and focus group session and they courageously shared realities as they perceive them.

**what others think of you.** Two main themes emerged for this prompt: stereotypes and assumptions. Students felt that others made many false assumptions about their race, such as assuming a student was Hispanic when she identifies as Black, or assuming a student is Black when he is actually of mixed race, both Filipino and Black, and using these assumptions to characterize them as “lazy, dumb, poor, or violent”. Several students felt that others thought they were aggressive or drug addicts because of their race. One Hispanic student said she thought others viewed her as “illegal” and that she wasn't “allowed to be here”. Another said

she thought others assumed she was “afraid to be here” because she is white. Two students both said they thought others assumed they played sports and “got into a lot of fight” because they are Black and tall. All students agreed that they believe others think they are “challenged in school, dumb, and not as smart as other kids” because of where they live and go to school.

Students shared that they thought others viewed them as behavior problems, not capable, poor, and behind in school. They also agreed that others think they don’t care about school and will probably drop out. One White student said he felt others thought he must be bullied at school by the Black students, so therefore must not have many friends at school. Another said he thought others thought he was smart because he looked Asian (he stated this as a negative).

**what others think of your school.** The word that was repeated most often by the students when discussing what they thought others thought of their school was *ghetto*. They believe others view their school as dangerous, run-down, and out of control, stating, “people think we need extra safety and patrols”. One student shared, “yeah, they think it’s [the school] more ratchet or ghetto or whatever”. Several students mentioned that others think they have problems with vandalism at their school and that “kids that go here grow up to be gangsters and thugs and all that stuff.” One student seemed to provide a succinct summary of the group’s statements when he said, “[They think] we don’t learn, we have a lot of fights, and that we only have an [advanced program] to improve our accreditation, not because we deserve it.” Students also mentioned that others think that the teachers at their school don’t care and only teach there because they have to (not because they want to) or can’t get another job, also noting that others think their teachers aren’t as qualified as teachers at other schools.

It’s important to highlight the use of the word *ghetto* here. Historically, ghetto was used to denote a place primarily occupied by a specific minority group (based on race, religion, and/or

class) but in recent times, ghetto is less about a place or group and more value-laden, synonymous with low-class behavior or something constructed out of subpar materials, and is a derogatory term used to denote individuals or groups of people (or even things) that lack an acceptable standard of manners, ethics, or construction (Domonoske, 2014). By the students' use of the term ghetto to describe how people view their school and community, it hints at internalization on a broader scale. The word selection seems to denote that they have internalized deficit terminology into their everyday speech and although the meaning of the term is often derogatory *towards* them, the use of the word *by* them is as casual as the use of any other everyday word.

**what others think of your community.** The main theme that emerged from this portion of the discussion was *criminal*. Students felt that others saw their neighborhood as violent, dangerous, and riddled with shootings and drug dealers. They felt that others saw everyone in their neighborhood as “bad”. Again, poverty was a dominant theme throughout this narrative. Students shared that others think they are “poor and dangerous” because they “all live in the courts” (public housing) and that others “associate apartments with poorer people or people who don't work, they automatically think that it's poor only. They also associate poor with dumb children.” Several students expressed their belief that others think everyone on their “end of town” hates the police and “think all cops are bad.”

**what others think about your ability to be a change-maker.** Many of the statements shared around this topic were focused on age. All of the students felt that others thought they were too young to make a difference in their community, either because they were too young to understand the issue or too young to care. They shared that others “underestimated” their ability, saying, “when you're young, nobody wants to listen to you”, “they think we're not smart enough

to make a difference because we're young and don't have the education or experience", and "they think we're not serious, that we're young and only want to help because it's a trend or for attention." Race also came up during this conversation, with one student stating, "they don't think we can make a difference because based on where we live and our race, because why would kids over here, 'poor black kids', want to do that...that's not what we care about. They think we all want to wear Jordans, goof off, not care about our education, and become a rap star, or basketball star, or football star", and another student felt that others thought she couldn't be a change-maker because her, "problems are not big because I'm White, so I can't make change about issues in my community. Like, I have some privilege and I don't have anything to suffer over."

### **Research Question 1**

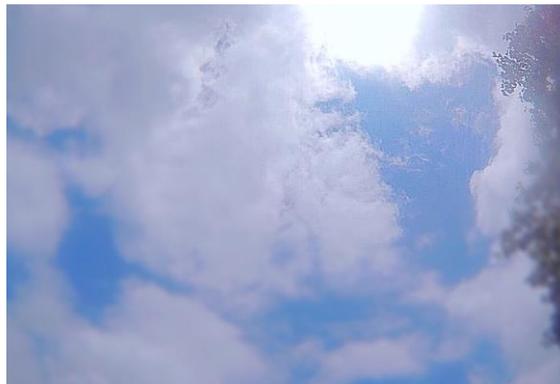
#### **Narratives of Identity: It's Who I am...It's Who We Are**

When students were asked to interpret the photos they took representing the strengths and assets of self and self as student (identity), similar concepts emerged among the participants. Narratives of perseverance, positivity, organization, a love of learning, pride, a strong work ethic, and caring dominated the dialogue, weaving the themes of agency, capital, and belonging throughout. Students saw themselves as resilient and proud, noting how these strengths allowed them the freedom to stand up to negativity and navigate challenges with their heads held high. Students shared their optimism and caring, representing their love of family, pride in who they are (both their physical and emotional traits), and an intrinsic desire to remain positive no matter the circumstances. Their curiosity, a thirst for knowledge, and the ability to do well out of a desire to *be more*, represents their aspirations, as well as familial and resistant capital. Below,

you will find fragments of student stories, their words powerfully reinforcing, animating, and at times challenging these theoretical frames in a language of their own.

**identity as self.** Jazmyn shared a photo of the sky with clouds and light coming through the spaces between the clouds (see Figure 2). She stated that this picture represents perseverance and when asked how, she said,

well, so, my parents, they always tell me to fly above the clouds and they say don't fly in between or below. I need to stay on top, like that's my goal in life, and I feel like they are always moving, clouds. Their goal is to keep shade sometimes or give something out like light. My goal in life is to stay above the clouds and they [parents] always tell me when I reach my goal, make a higher one, and that's what clouds do, they have a cycle. I would say never giving up is my strength. Anywhere you go or whoever you meet, they always have one thing they really look to, like everybody has one thing that they really want to achieve in life, and it [the picture] lets people know that I don't quit.



*Figure 2. Jazmyn's Photo to Represent Self*

Pete took a photo of a sunset at dusk with a large dark cloud visible on the left and the sunset still visible on the right, with the silhouette of houses in the background (see Figure 3).

He identified his strength as optimism/positivity. He shares,

this picture tells that I've been calm through certain situations...the sunset is supposed to represent the bright side of things while the dark cloud is approaching, and the bright side is going to keep on going even if the dark cloud is coming. It shows that I'm optimistic, and the dark clouds could show hate or

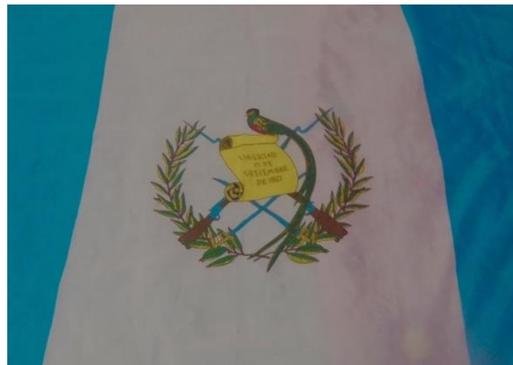
negativity closing in, but that there's still more of the bright colors, or the positive, that shines through.



*Figure 3. Pete's Photo to Represent Self*

Rose shared a picture of the Guatemalan national flag and she said the strength represented by this photo was pride (see Figure 4). She said,

it's a symbol of me because I came from there, and it represents me and my culture and everything that I do. It's like, I'm from there and I'm proud to be from there. [The pride] it's from my family...my grandma, when she was still alive, she told me stories and made food and my mom still tells me stories of growing up in Guatemala...passing it down from generation to generation. Even though I was born in another place, I'm here and I'm a part of the community. Even though I'm proud to be where I'm from, I'm also proud to be here in this community and I want to be a part of the community.



*Figure 4. Rose's Photo to Represent Self*

Olivia shared a picture of two seemingly happy dogs in a yard. She identified the strength she was conveying by this picture as caring (see Figure 5). When asked why she chose this picture to represent that she is caring, she said,

to me, this shows, uhh, being caring or being loving towards animals. I think a lot of people like animals, and it's something people love and everybody can talk about. It lets people know that teenagers can be responsible, teenagers can take care of things, we aren't like reckless and that I guess other people might think that we can't take care of things, and it shows that everybody can care for things no matter where they are or what's going on.



*Figure 5. Olivia's Photo to Represent Self*

Other strengths of self that were shared during the interviews represent uniqueness, determination, responsibility, creativity, and family values. These concepts are forms of capital that the students felt they could use to succeed now and in the future, despite barriers and limitations (which they also recognized). Belonging also emerged, as several students were quick to point out that they felt accepted for whom they are and supported by their families, peers, teachers, and community.

Bella took a photo of a banner that states, “Be Yourself...An Original is Always Worth More” and defined her strength of self as being an original/unique (see Figure 6). She stated,

this photo makes me feel happy because I'm my own individual self and I like a lot of stuff that a lot of people don't, or they don't know about, and it's about me as an original person. A positive about being an original is that your work is going to stand out

because it's different. You don't have to follow society, THOSE type of rules, and you can just be different and feel confident. I think I feel confident because of people accepting it, I'm not shamed for it. I'm accepted so I feel confident and when so many people are trying to copy and wear the same things as everybody else, it just feels good to be different.



*Figure 6. Bella's Photo to Represent Self*

**identity as student.** Liam shared a picture of his President's Award and stated that the photo represented his "good work ethic" (see Figure 7). He said it shows,

I am hardworking and that you should get recognition that you deserve for the work you put in, so I think it's great to do award ceremonies and hand out certificates like this. It might not mean a lot to the person handing them out but you're that kid that takes home several awards and you're like, 'that's me, I did that'. I want to go somewhere and I don't know where that is, but I know I don't want to waste the opportunity I'm given, so if that means working my butt off in school, that's what I'm going to do...I want to be happy and I don't want to dig myself a hole just because I don't want to do the work.



*Figure 7. Liam's Photo to Represent Self as Student*

Rose took a picture of a box with the word “learn” highlighted on the front to represent her love of learning (see Figure 8). She shared,

well, the box says learn and me, I love to learn. Ever since I was a child...I started reading when I was two! I love math and science and it’s just interesting to me to know more things about the world. I love learning how the mind works...it’s just so interesting. Like, ummm, Hispanics are very stereotyped as dumb. Like, you’re Hispanic so you don’t know anything, you’re dumb. But me loving learning and being good at it, I’m not just a dumb Hispanic, I’m smart (well, people call me smart), like if you ask my teachers they would tell you I love to learn. My math teacher would tell you that I’m always participating and doing more math problems than I have to. [I] don’t sleep in class and I’m not lazy and I’m interested in learning.



*Figure 8. Rose’s Photo to Represent Self as Student*

Izzy showed me a picture of (in her own words), a “disgusting looking softball cleat and a bag, my softball bag” (see Figure 9). She said she took this photo to represent that she is “organized and balanced”. She stated,

it shows that I really love the sport and it shows that you can be balanced and have your hobbies and sports and still be a good student in school. My mom told me to make sure I was organized well and have a good system and make sure you prioritize and make sure you make time to get done what you need to get done before anything else, such as sports and hobbies. As a student, I feel I’m pretty good at organizing my time and being balanced between sports and school and stuff and getting A’s on my schoolwork.



Figure 9. Izzy's Photo to Represent Self as Student

Olivia took a picture of a sunset over the water (a river) taken from a boat (see Figure 10). She said this photo is an interpretation of her confidence as a student. For her, it represents,

just being able to ask your teachers things, or being able to talk to your teachers, or being able to do things your own way, so if they give you a project you can turn in something that's your own style. I think this shows me going places and being adventurous but as a student, I used to not be able to talk to my teachers and be really shy and I've gotten better at it 'cause you have to be able to talk to people, but I don't know...it could be confidence. Yeah, motivation, confidence I would say. I think it could show that everybody has, like, a voice and everybody can be confident to do things. People on this side of town don't just sit around they, like everybody, can do something and everybody can get something done and everybody can talk about problems. It doesn't matter where you're from 'cause everybody has a voice.



Figure 10. Olivia's Photo to Represent Self as Student

Other strengths noted by the students when describing their photographs selected to represent the strengths and assets of themselves as students included: curious, proud, creative, ambitious, mindful, and a love of reading. They shared stories of wanting to prove *others* wrong

in their assumptions that *they couldn't achieve* and expressed pride in being able to do so. Again, family support and motivation (belonging and capital) emerged as central to the narratives.

Jazmyn shared a picture she took with the words “Watch us Soar” (see Figure 11).

“Because that’s what I aim to do as a student...soar”, she noted. She said she chose this photo to represent her ambition. She stated,

one of our sayings at school is watch us soar, the theme, and I feel like it is my job to succeed ‘cause there’s kids that can’t go to school ‘cause they have to pay or don’t have the right supplies. So as a student, I feel like if I can succeed I can help other kids succeed because making a path for myself can make a path for somebody else. I see people who aren’t successful in my family and I just don’t want to be like that. I want to prove the people wrong who always said I couldn’t do it and then when they see me, see that I can do it, [it] will change their whole look on things.



Figure 11. Jazmyn’s Photo to Represent Self as Student

### **Narratives of Community: The Place We Call Home**

When students shared stories of the strengths and assets of their school and community, the school’s music department and the “great, diverse, unique, many” programs offered at their school, like their school garden, came up time and time again. When sharing their stories of the strengths and assets of their community, multiple students self-selected pictures to represent strength and support. These stories highlight connections between photovoice and critical service learning as students’ representations of the programs at their school, and the resilience of their community, were shared in a way that moved beyond the visual. The visual was a tool to represent the deeper meaning of addressing issues such as food insecurity, equity in education,

and racial injustice. Students shared instances of how the act of taking these pictures provided a *real-world* sense of something they had learned in class (connection to academics) but also an interpretation of something they had experienced in the world. They were not just taking a picture of a garden, or reflecting on life science, but also what that garden means to the students in their school and to their community. Critical service learning takes learning by doing to another level and here, students were not just talking about working in the garden or doing an assignment about the garden, they were sharing the *need* for the garden from an issues-based perspective, a perspective that I feel was heightened by the use of photovoice. These are important findings for a project like this and I will discuss more in Chapter 5.

**school as community.** Olivia shared a picture that she took of flowers growing in the garden at their school (see Figure 12). She said this picture represented the “good programs” at her school that support students and the community. For her, the unseen story (and why she chose this picture to represent her school) is,

to me it shows there’s a bunch of programs going on at our school and we do a lot of things that are important. And also doing things in the garden, we sell the food, and give back to our community which is very important. Teachers, they care to do this for us. They want us to do good things and somebody has to provide the opportunities. I think it could show uniqueness, kind of uniqueness, but like, ‘hey we have these awesome programs and we’re giving back to our community’.



Figure 12. Olivia’s Photo to Represent School

Liam also highlighted the school garden program as a strength of the school, sharing a picture of a garden t-shirt that says “Lettuce Turnip the Beet” (see Figure 13). He said he chose this picture to represent the unique programs at his school, noting,

we have an awesome hands-on learning program that raises money to help the garden grow. [It’s] unique, I mean I couldn’t tell you another school that has a garden like ours...with a market. In general, I’m a very hands-on learner, even if it doesn’t really have to do with school, it’s helped me to learn more about plants and growing and I’ve even started my own garden at home because of this, because I wouldn’t know what to do with it otherwise. Well, [with] a lot of clubs, you think of things that aren’t really hands-on but I don’t want to keep saying hands-on because this program is much more than that .... [the teachers] they even help support the garden by buying vegetables and stuff...they like to be a part of it as well.

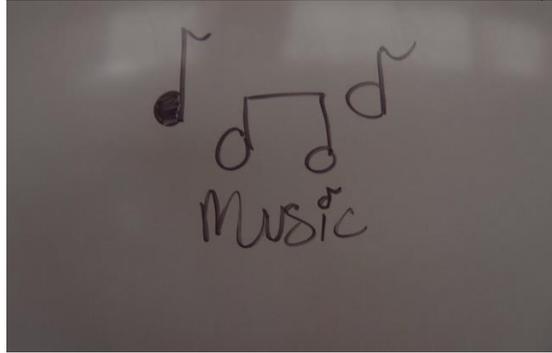


*Figure 13.* Liam’s Photo to Represent School

Bella shared a picture of a white board with the word “music” written on it, surrounded by music notes, to represent her school’s music department as a strength (see Figure 14). She explained,

it represents that we have an amazing, amazing music program and that we’re really close like a family, and we like to learn music and sing...and that we’re good at it! [Being a part of it] makes me feel homey and we’re very close and we learn. It’s because of church, I think...a lot of people go to church and not just church, but the music, a lot of music around our neighborhoods, doesn’t matter if its rap, gospel, pop, just a lot of music, and people love singing or playing instruments and when

people have those things in common, people are close-knit. And the teachers at our school (some people think they don't care about us) but, the teacher in our music program, she wrote every single student in our program a handwritten note at graduation, even the people who had just joined, she wrote them. Everyone had notes and everyone was crying 'cause we just felt loved.



*Figure 14. Bella's Photo to Represent School*

Jazmyn also had this to say about the music program when talking about her picture of a school building with the letter "H" on it -the music hall (see Figure 15),

music is very important to my school and a lot of kids like music so this picture is of an "H", that's the hall that the arts are located on in our school – the arts hall. So you have the band and chorus and strings and across from it you have the art room...I call it the creative hall! When you walk past this hall, the teachers are really nice and they always ask how your day was...they're nice. It comes from the teachers, they give us that "I know you can do it" type feel and every student needs that push that motivates them so when you come here it's like really .... (big smile).



*Figure 15. Jazmyn's Photo to Represent School*

Several of the students also mentioned diversity as a strength of their school. On the surface, this may seem interesting as their school has a racial make-up of ~87% Black, but the students were quick to share their narratives about their idea of diversity as a strength at their school. Pete took a picture of a flower made out of different types of beans and seeds to represent this diversity (see Figure 16). He said he took this picture because,

it shows that we can all work together because even though we all have our differences, we can all come together to make one big picture. It represents all kinds of different beans and they're all diverse and I guess that's our school, we have a diverse school with multiple races and for example, I'm Black and Filipino and that makes our school even more diverse. It's really a picture that shows a lot of people coming together and we each represent a different type of bean, and I guess they [others] could learn that not everything is the same, and we all have our different assets and strengths and potentials to become who we are. It's not just about race, it's about our ideas and our different personalities too. People might think if it's [the school] all one race then everyone must think and act the same, but that's not it.



*Figure 16.* Pete's Photo to Represent School

Other strengths and assets associated by students with their school were an amazing library, school pride, dedicated students, caring students and staff, and good learning environments. Izzy shared a picture of a door at her school with the word "Library" spelled out (see Figure 17). She shared,

this represents a strength that our library is a really good library. It's full of really good books and all sorts of subjects and really

great librarians that really care, and they make sure you read and [they] want to know what you're reading, so it doesn't feel forced. I know that sometimes one of the librarians actually put in her own money towards books if kids couldn't pay the late fees so that's good. Obviously, a school has to have a library, but that could mean anything from a few books on the shelf and someone that doesn't care as a librarian, but at my school, the librarians and teachers and principal really want to make sure that the library is a safe place for kids to go and read and do work, and they put all the effort into making sure we have that. It doesn't really matter how much money families have but it's about how much people care and are willing to put a lot of effort towards making sure we have great things. [It's] powerful, like when you walk into the library doors and you see all those different books, it just kind of makes you feel magical.



*Figure 17. Izzy's Photo to Represent School*

**place as community.** To represent her community, Rose took a picture of a tree growing in her yard with some branches cut off and new branches growing back (see Figure 18). Rose shared this narrative:

My dad cut down the tree because my mom wanted it to be cut down and since it's summer and spring time, it grew more, it was like, 'no, not today' and it grew. [It shows] that we are strong...even if you cut us down or break us down, we will come right back because we are strong and we have a new experience, the new growth, to motivate us to not be shut down again. Some people have hardships and they've gone through bad experiences and when you're out of it you never want that to happen again, so we grow and learn from those experiences and they make us stronger. The bad experiences are our motivation to make us better.



*Figure 18. Rose's Photo to Represent Community*

Izzy shared a picture of a poster hanging in her room at home that states, “never let anyone dull your sparkle” (see Figure 19). She said she chose this picture to represent that her community is strong. She stated,

my community is very “sparkly”. They’re not going to sit down and let that issue bother them, they’re going to stand up for themselves and stand up for our community as a whole...they’re going to be seen. [My community] is strong in being very good at standing up for good causes...there’s a ton of walks to raise money for causes and the thing is, that one person has to stand up for it and it’s a chain reaction and they stand together to make a difference. I think it’s because of how [people in my community] were raised. Kind of stereotypical southern roots is to stand up for yourself, not go with the flow...overall values and morals. And I think that comes from slavery. Basically, like, slaves had to stand up for themselves and pioneer where we are now and that’s been passed down through the generations for families in our community. They know what’s going on, and they will stand up for themselves...they are empowered and won’t just sit there.



*Figure 19. Izzy's Photo to Represent Community*

Pete also took a picture of a tree to represent the support and unity in his community (see

Figure 20). Pete said,

ummm, it represents unity and I thought that each leaf and branch all comes together at the trunk, which is the core of our community, and we all try to support each other, even if one of the branches falls we all try to help each other get through that situation. I think [it's] because we just learned to accept each other for who we are, and that we've actually tried to learn about each other without having any conflict within the families. We meet each other in the neighborhood and we host a party to introduce new people into the neighborhood, just to get to know them and them to get to know us and it makes me feel happy, because once I get to know them I always have someone to look up to even if my parents or relatives aren't around. I can go to someone if I need help.



*Figure 20.* Pete's Photo to Represent Community

Several students also highlighted diversity and opportunity as main strengths of their community. Jazmyn took a picture of a magnolia tree growing in her neighborhood to express her community's diversity (see Figure 21). Through her interpretation of this picture, she shared,

I picked this because trees are together, they might not look together, but everything is connected in to the roots. From the highest to the lowest branch, the longest to the shortest branch, this represents my community, at the end of the day we are one ...the branches represent the people and the leaves represent what's inside 'cause when you look at a leaf you compare each one, it's different, the lines... some go up here and some go that way and they're each a different color at the ends. And if you actually have the time to observe, it's different, everything is different but it's all one unit, the tree. Like my community, it's

diverse but they're still really alike and everybody is connected. I mean we have our differences but we have stuff the same...our community is supportive of each other. You have good parts and the not so good parts but the house doesn't represent the people. The truth is that the nicest people might not be the richest but people in our neighborhood recognize people as people.



*Figure 21. Jazmyn's Photo to Represent Community*

Bella said she took a picture of people building a house in a new neighborhood development with a few vacant lots (see Figure 22) to represent the strength of opportunity in her community. She said,

this represents our community because we're growing and expanding and getting bigger and better and the vacant lots symbolize that we still have room for improvement. [It] makes me feel good that I don't have to go far to go to Walmart and people who don't have cars or money to get far can now just walk up the street and that may be where they can get food, clothes, and jobs. Lots of new job opportunities and new opportunities for jobs, housing, basic needs. I think that people have been inspired to realize that our neighborhood can be better – someone had a bigger vision of our community and, ummm, that people are going to take advantage of the new opportunities and embrace it.



*Figure 22. Bella's Photo to Represent Community*

Many other strengths were noted during this portion of the student interviews.

Perseverance, caring, resources, positivity, safety, and inspiring were all shared by students as assets they believe represent their community. Thinking about resources, Olivia took a picture (at night) of a newly-constructed public library in her community that she says shows off the architectural design and a valued resource (see Figure 23). In discussing the strength represented by this photo, Olivia stated,

I think it shows that our community wants a place for people to go – the whole idea of building it for a bunch of people to go. Libraries are free and it's really nice. There's places for you to sit and read and you can play on the computer and there's a bunch of programs and groups. It's important to have a place for everybody to go... it took a lot of time and work and it's just a place where a whole bunch of people can go and I think it's important for kids to have somewhere to go and to have books and things like that. Sometimes people don't have things at their house or they live somewhere really small and not a lot of room, and they live with a bunch of siblings so having a big place like this is important for kids to go, somewhere to learn or go, somewhere to hang out that's not stuck at home all day, and it doesn't cost money so they can just go have fun. You can't really scream, play, or run but you can do a lot of other things. It's a good place, a gathering place.



*Figure 23.* Olivia's Photo to Represent Community

## **Narratives of Sense of Place within Community: We Belong**

As noted, I did not specifically ask students to take pictures representing their sense of place within their community nor did I ask this as a specific question during their photo elicitation interviews. My reasoning behind this choice was that *sense of place* is a very abstract concept, especially to youth, and I felt that I would be better able to capture this concept through an analysis of their collective narratives, looking for instances in which *place* emerged, not necessarily in the physical sense, but also in the sense of belonging. That said, place in a physical sense is important to this project due to the connections between group belonging and physical space. Gruenwald (2003) argues that for empowerment and social change to occur, “people must be challenged to reflect on their own concrete situationality in a way that explores complex interrelationships between cultural and ecological environments” (p. 6), and through regional survey, Mumford (1938) argues that a geographic area must be viewed from a variety of vantage points to ensure that students are engaged in observing, analyzing, and improving their world around them. Through this project, the use of photovoice as critical service learning, students were able to see the places they inhabit (school, home, and community) as *their* community, making meaningful connections between relationship and place and how these connections relate to a sense of belonging. In previous findings, Izzy shared a story about her school library being a safe place where students could go, Olivia shared a story of her local community library as being a “gathering place”, and Liam identified the garden space at his school as “a place where people can work together to meet the needs of our community.” If these physical places were not present, students’ sense of belonging within their community would be diminished, if not non-existent. In some respects, their stories highlighted sense of belonging in

direct correlation to a physical space and how the realization of the physical location leads to a manifestation of feelings of inclusion, support, and pride.

Throughout the interviews, all of the students used the words “we” and “our” to describe their community and 16 photographs were taken of a specific place and then used to represent feelings of belonging (see Figure 24). This denotes, to me, a proximal relationship, an oneness, with the space they share as community and their associations to this space. Their word choice and selection of pictures seems to convey that they do not associate themselves as separate from this space, instead choosing to bring the community back into the classroom through meaning-making and contextualization.



Figure 24. Place-based Photo Collage to Represent Sense of Belonging

I also found that all of the students placed a heavy emphasis on the role of *family*, and *being a part of family*, as well as everyone looking out for each other (support for and from each other), and their contributions (roles) within the community when sharing their strengths and assets represented by their photos. For each strength represented by a photograph, I asked the

students where they thought that strength came from (why did they, their school, their community possess that strength) and the response was a resounding “family” on many occasions. School “felt like family”, community “was like a family”, and strength after strength was attributed to support from family, learned from family, and possible because of family. These links between relationship and place, representing a sense of belonging, are best highlighted by the students’ own words.

So as not to repeat photographs shared throughout this chapter, I have selected two photographs and connected student narratives that I feel best represent this notion of belonging as the link between relationship and place. Following these narratives, I have selected several student quotations from the interview sessions that further highlight this construct.

Rose shared a photograph of a single gold ring shadowed with contrasts of light (see Figure 25). She stated that this photo represents her family. She shared,

well, this ring was given to me by my mom who gave one to me and all of my sisters on Christmas, so we have the exact same ring, but multiple of the same ring, and it was made by my uncle in Guatemala. To me this symbolizes my sisters always supporting me and always having my back. We all love each other and we always have each other’s back, and when we came here we didn’t really know any one and we only had each other and our other family so that’s what we knew – we’ve been, like, very close together. I think it symbolizes that I’m a person too, I have a family, I have a personality, I have feelings, I’m a person. We are a diverse community...there are black people, white people, Hispanic people, different types of people...there might not be many of different types but there are different types and we all matter too. Family values and morals are important to us and we look out for each other.



*Figure 25. Rose's Photo Representing Family*

Jazmyn shared a photo of a piano; the black and white keys prominent in the foreground, to represent how each person in a community makes up parts of a whole (see Figure 26). She stated,

we are like a piano too...we're like keys and each one makes a different sound, so I'm like a piano when it comes to making change...lower, like C, a little higher...so as a person and a community, we're like that too...we have keys, our eyes, our mouths, our hands...all of that has an ability to make a change, a difference, just like keys have a different sound. With change there's no age limit, it doesn't matter how old or how young as long as you've got the keys and each one of us has keys and I use mine and other people use theirs, parts of a whole...it makes a difference.



*Figure 26. Jazmyn's Photo Representing Parts of a Whole*

Further reinforcing the notion of a sense of place, the narratives highlighting support include statements such as, “we help our neighbors and so we help each other. We are good

people and we like to support each other” (Rose), “people here look out for each other and, the older generation, they look out and take care of the kids in the community, if they see a door, they’re going to help us get into it and open it for us” (Jazmyn), “it makes me feel safe because I know that I have people around me that care and they watch over us” (Pete), and “the people in our community are inspiring each other to greater things to help people no matter how small or how big it might be, they still impact the neighborhood. We look out for each other. It’s not a handout, it’s just support” (Bella). A few other student stories, when describing their photos, highlighted the idea that students not only felt a sense of belonging, but also felt a sense of empowerment and worthiness, self-reporting as role-models, leaders, and a source of inspiration for their community, such as, “it represents my ability to be a role model and making sure that I’m always showing the optimistic side and everybody who sees me is seeing that good side of me, inspiring others in my community, especially the kids” (Izzy), and “it shows that I care and want to help my community. When others see me caring, they are inspired and then they want to do good things too” (Liam). All of these statements place the student *within* and exude a sense of active participation - having a role to play - within their community, suggesting a strong sense of place and a concrete assuredness in their *belonging*.

## **Research Question 2**

### **Narratives of Ability to be Change Agents: Using our Superpowers for Good**

During the analysis of the narratives students shared related to their ability to be change-makers, I found that many of the strengths and assets they identified were not duplicated. Positivity and caring were duplicated but there were many others expressed, including uniqueness, determination, awareness, passionate, empowered, knowledgeable, willingness to serve, confidence, creativity, family support, inspiring, persistent, and brave. As there were a

variety of individual attributes provided by students about their ability to be change-makers, I have chosen to share only a sampling of student narratives in this section, those narratives that I feel powerfully and collectively highlight the underlying meaning of what the students were hoping to convey through this series of student-selected photographs (based on their narratives for this section as a whole). Also, many students noted they felt they were able to make a difference despite stereotypical (mis)perceptions about their age. Their narratives often reflected that no matter how young they were, they were confident they could (and would) make a difference and that their abilities to make change should not be underestimated.

With so many concepts represented and with so many different contexts provided by the students, the analytic themes of agency, capital, and belonging seemed to overlap and sometimes merge throughout the narratives, even within a single story. That said, as you read through the selected narratives below, you will find that all three frames are strongly represented. Students shared their abilities to maintain hopes and dreams for their futures (aspirational), their possession of skills to help them succeed (navigational), support from numerous sources (social), strong family bonds (familial), and obtaining knowledge for the purpose of *rising up* (resistant). Because of this wealth, and their valuing of it, students shared a confidence in their abilities to empower, lead, and give back to others, evoking a sense of belonging within and for something greater than themselves.

**change-makers.** Rose took a picture of a girl looking at a globe in a library (see Figure 27). Rose said this photo represented awareness of issues going on in the world and that her awareness allows her to be a change-maker. She shared that she took this picture because,

I love being curious and I want to go everywhere in the world and I want to see the world and I, like, know things that are happening around the world and I'm very active in the world. I'm aware and I actually care and that awareness helps me know what's going

on, and that gives me a desire to make it better and make it different. You can't make a change if you aren't aware that there needs to be a change. I know that there are problems that need to be fixed and I can do that if I want to...I think it's all about knowing, and I know. Being a child doesn't disable me from being able to make a change...it enables me because it's my future and I want my future to be bright and better and clean instead of dark and dim with horrible air and water you can't drink. The globe represents my desire to go out into the world and make a difference.



*Figure 27. Rose's Photo to Represent Ability to be a Change-Maker*

Izzy shared a picture of a clock, “like a school clock with hands”, to represent her passion for issues of injustice and how this passion allows her to make a difference (see Figure 28).

During her interview, she stated,

it's basically about time, it's just a number and it doesn't matter ... I think no matter how much time has gone by, if there's an issue and you think it's wrong then you should stand up for that even if the norm says otherwise, don't let time passing change your mind to stand up! You can do something even if time has passed, don't let time lesson your morals. You can't measure the issue by time, or measure it on a clock. I think the strength that gives me my ability to make a difference is the issue I'm passionate about, the women's rights thing. This has been going on for a long time but I care about it...the women's marches are really empowering because you.... women cook and clean and men go out and work but women can do the same things and I don't understand why people have to be categorized! If you feel you want to cook and clean, fine, but if you want to go to work, go to work, do what you want to do! There's still changes that need to be made and so even if we've been fighting for a long time, you can still continue to fight...I'm empowered by other

strong women in my family. Some people might say I'm a kid and I don't know anything about it, but I think that even if you haven't experienced it first-hand, other women you know have...your mom has experienced it, you hear her stories, and you're old enough to comprehend basic feelings, so I mean I'm old enough to read about the wage gap so I can comprehend that...it's important to start now. I'm going to have those experiences one day. I would say that if I'm old enough to comprehend algebra, why can't I be old enough to comprehend the typical issues in the world?



*Figure 28. Izzy's Photo to Represent Ability to be a Change-Maker*

Liam chose a picture of a Goodwill donation drive-thru to represent caring as the strength that enables him to make a difference in his community (see Figure 29). He shared,

If I didn't care, what would be done? I wouldn't have any passion or drive to make a difference. It would just be, if I don't care nothing would happen. Same with anybody else. If no one cares, then nothing's going to happen. So caring means that you're actually going to try and be able to look at other people and their situation and want to give back. And part of you may even feel guilt because you can realize that you've been ungrateful at times, and I know I've been ungrateful at times, and honestly, that's just wrong because when you look at other people you realize how thankful they would be to be in your situation, so being caring, it really opens your eyes and makes you just become a better person in general. We can give, not just take, and they might not take younger kids as seriously because they haven't lived a life and experienced as many things and honestly, if you ask me, those are excuses. So a lot of it is you just need to look in someone else's eyes and realize that just because they're younger doesn't mean they are at a disadvantage with these things.



*Figure 29.* Liam's Photo to Represent Ability to be a Change-Maker

Bella took a picture of a small journal with the words “do one thing every day that scares you” written on the front (see Figure 30). She described how this photo represents her ability to be a change-maker as,

because I'm not afraid to try something new, something that scares me, which is a lot to say because some people might not go out of their comfort zone and that limits what they can do and what they can achieve. I'm not afraid...I'm brave. Being brave helps you make change because if you're scared to do or try something it's not going to get things accomplished. If you stay in your one little bubble you won't get to explore all the different things in the world and make change. It makes you more aware of issues in your community and in the world. If you don't get out, you don't know there is a problem, then it's hard to want to make change and it also helps you work with other groups and talk to other people. It can change stereotypes because if a person isn't afraid to do something...if Malala wasn't brave, she wouldn't be where she is today and because of that, people might think of her whole race differently. She probably had fear but she did it anyway!



*Figure 30.* Bella's Photo to Represent Ability to be a Change-Maker

To represent his ability to be a change-maker, Pete took a photo of a small garden in his backyard that he grew with his parents (see Figure 31). Pete described this picture as representing his ability to start a movement within his community by encouraging others. He said,

Well, in my neighborhood, when I first tried to start a garden I tried to encourage my neighbors to grow their own gardens without going to the store where they use pesticides and products to make their stuff look good, and so I actually got a few of my neighbors to grow their own garden. They actually grow their own corn and so sometimes they lend us some and we share our tomatoes. I started a movement in my neighborhood...that's why this picture is part of my ability to make a change. It could show that even though I'm young, I have people that support me and I can encourage others to make a change in their own backyards. Since I encourage and lead others, they can teach other people and keep spreading it around the community.



*Figure 31.* Pete's Photo to Represent Ability to be a Change-Maker

### **Research Question 3**

#### **Photovoice as Critical Service Learning and the Construction of Student Narratives**

During the final reflection session of the project, students were asked to reflect on the process as a whole: How this project was different and similar from other critical service learning projects they had participated in, how this project may have impacted them and their views of self and community, and in what ways did the photovoice method help them to tell their *story* (if it did)? My findings are outlined below based on student reflections and my own

observations of student discussions centered on each of these questions. This section is also a place where I found a significant tension between what the students were saying and what they were *not* sharing. During this session, as students reflected on the questions above, not one student shared a negative statement about the project. I prompted them with follow-up questions about what may have gone wrong, were there frustrations along the way, etc., and still, nothing negative came to light. Based on the tensions within myself shared previously, my first inclination was to accept their words, not only affirming photovoice as a form of critical service learning but also as the best method for the construction of student narratives as I wanted to be true to their thoughts and feelings. I do not doubt their sincerity; however, no method is perfect and no design is without flaw. Looking more closely through a critical lens, I began to reflect on why I was not hearing about their frustrations with the process, their challenges, and their own doubts, as I am sure they were present. For example, a student had expressed concerns early on in the process that her camera was broken and she could only take photos in a specific mode, limiting her creativity. Another had mentioned during a weekly reflection session that he was having a hard time choosing which pictures to take to best represent the strengths he had identified and he felt stressed as a result. Another student went on vacation and missed one of the reflection sessions, afterwards sharing that she felt disconnected from her peers and the project for that part of the process. Although students did note that this process helped them to be more aware of the assets *and* injustices surrounding them and their community, they were quick to justify the injustice with a positive. Journaling and memoing helped with my own reflection and I feel that my relationship with these students played a big role in their responses to these final questions. They wanted it to *work for me*, they only had *good* things to say *for me*, and they may or may not have only told me what they thought I wanted to hear because they care for and

respect me as a teacher and as a mentor. My faith, belief in, and genuine care for, these students also undoubtedly affected my perspective when creating the study design, including my choice of questions for this section. In another setting and context, this tension may not have existed and the results may have been different, but as unintentional as it was, it is crucial for me to be transparent. Therefore, when reading this section, be aware of what the students are not saying, as that narrative also needs to be told. Note: not all quotations in this section will have attributes as some of the statements were shared anonymously during individual reflection activities.

**differences and similarities between this photovoice project and other critical service learning projects.** Overall, students seemed to feel that this project was more student-led and self-directed, much more unique, and allowed them more of a *voice* than other critical service learning projects in which they had participated. Many of them also felt this project was different in that it focused more on them personally, how they felt and what they thought, than other projects, which they said were often focused on the thoughts and feelings of others. For example, Bella shared, “This project has been different than other projects because in other projects we are usually giving to our community. In this project, we are showing what our community is/means to us”, Olivia said, “It’s different because it involves using my own stories and life experiences [to tell a story]”, and Liam stated, “We focused this project on ourselves. Usually, these projects are about a main subject we all follow, like homelessness or something. With photovoice, we all took extremely different paths because it's about ourselves and not us as a whole.” They had less to say about the perceived similarities, with the general consensus being that like other projects they had worked on, the photovoice project showed the good in their community, allowed them to be creative, and “was meaningful and [made] a difference in people’s lives.”

**photovoice project's impact on views of self and community.** Overwhelmingly, all students agreed that this project impacted them in a positive way, most notably by providing them an opportunity to really see the good in themselves and their community. Jazmyn noted, "It made me look at things that I wouldn't have looked at. I'm always focusing on all the negative things in my community, I forgot about a lot of the positive things going on. I realize that I'm good at putting a lot of meaning into things. It gave me more confidence in my ability to make a change. My views on my community are balanced now (good + bad)." Liam felt he was impacted by this project as,

It's really helped me realize how good of a person I am. I don't like giving myself credit, so this project helped me understand I'm better than what I give myself credit for. On a regular basis, I don't think about my community or the things happening around me. This project forced me to think and explore my surroundings. I have a better appreciation for my community. Photovoice helped me open my eyes to all the wonderful things in my life. I never would've thought about things I do now without this project. Like going into the depths of myself and my community.

One student shared, "I realized I am open minded and accepting. I realized how much I appreciate my community", and another reflected, "I've seen myself as more of a change maker and less of a teen who can't do anything. It's also made me see the good in my community and made me proud of that."

**thoughts and feelings after this project.** One resounding and notable theme to emerge from student reflections of on their thoughts and feelings after participating in this project was an awareness of assets and injustices in their own community. They reflected after the project that by having to focus on their strengths, they also became more aware that not everyone is treated equally in their school and community. They noted that this project really made them think beyond the surface about issues, and how they can be change-makers in their own community.

Izzy said, “I don’t judge a community based on its looks anymore, specifically my own”, and Olivia said, “I feel that we went into a more in-depth view of how people view communities. I am disappointed to some degree about how narrow-minded people can be. The project opened my eyes to [my community] and how diverse and interesting it is”, and Liam shared, “I do think much differently now because I focused on myself. Other projects focused on topics I couldn't personally relate to, but photovoice was a very deep project that MADE me think about the good things and the bad things.” These sentiments were supported throughout their individual interview narratives as Jazmyn shared a story of a substitute teacher that singled out students in the class as “bad kids” and when she got upset by this, the teacher said, “oh, not you, *those* kids.” Jazmyn shared that she was confused by this because she looked like, acted like, and was in the same class as *those* students. Bella also shared an example, stating, “some houses in our community are run-down and some kids don’t have as much and there are people in our school that look at them and treat them differently.”

**telling your story through photovoice.** A large portion of our final group reflection activity was spent discussing how (and if) photovoice helped the students tell their stories. The students all agreed that having pictures to represent their words was much easier, and much more powerful, in getting their messages across. They felt that having the photos to refer to, as well as the process of taking the photos, gave them a *broader voice* (as one student noted). One student summarized it best, “When writing or speaking, it's easy to confuse words, forget what you were saying, say something you didn't mean to. But with a photo, you have it all right there. You don't need to worry about what to remember or if you'll forget anything...the picture speaks for itself”, and another chimed in, “When you take a picture you can go more into detail about everything.

When you're writing and speaking, people have to image what you're saying. By taking pictures, they can get a better image of your idea or meaning of the situation."

## **Summary of Findings**

### **Student-perceived Dominant Narrative**

When the students defined others, they determined others were people who do not live in their neighborhood or attend their school and this student-derived definition set the tone for the focus group discussion that followed. As noted above, the dominant narrative that emerged was one of negative associations based on race, class, age, and where they live and attend school. These findings are summarized as a narrative portraying them as inferior, and less valued, than others. They believe others view them as poor, violent, and unintelligent with no desire or ability to make change for themselves or others, living in poor neighborhoods rife with criminal activity, and attending a school filled with aggressive students, uncaring and unqualified teachers, and little to no resources. When asked why they felt this way, they were quick to point out local news articles about occurrences in their community, articles regarding their school's lack of accreditation, and their own experiences with marginalization from those living outside of their community. These findings support the literature surrounding the perpetuation of and impact from deficit-thinking (Kohn, 2004; Yosso, 2005; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Noguera, 2003, 2009, & 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010, Valencia, 2010; Paris, 2012).

That said, I also heard them share stories of acceptance and understanding during this session. Several students pointed out that not everyone defined as an *other* felt this way as they had also heard many people talk about the good things happening at their school and in their community. All of the students agreed that the narrative they had constructed surrounding *the*

*others* was based on others' assumptions due to a lack of awareness and understanding. One student even noted that maybe people didn't really think those things about them and their school and community, but that since they didn't live in the neighborhood and had likely never been there, they could only make assumptions based on what they heard or saw in the media or from other people. They then said they felt that the media portrayal of their neighborhood and school was "exaggerated" as "bad news is always reported over good news", further supporting the literature on the influence of mainstream media in the perpetuation of deficit-thinking (Checkoway and Gutierrez, 2006).

What struck me as most notable during this session was a recognition by the students of the accuracy of what they believed were others' assumptions about them and more importantly, their justifications for this accuracy. One student, when discussing how others think their school is violent, stated, "well, we do have a lot of fights and stuff and a lot of kids get suspended, but that's not *all* of us." Another noted, "we aren't accredited but it's not because we aren't smart or because we don't want to learn, *some* of us are really smart." Also during the focus group, a student was discussing how it upsets him when people make assumptions about his academic ability based on their misperceptions of his race, suggesting he is of a single race (Asian and, therefore, really smart) when in fact he identifies as Black-Filipino, and another student spoke up and said, "OMG, I do that! I didn't realize I do that until just now when you said it, but yeah, I always assume all Asians are smart." She then proceeded to apologize to this student. Perhaps this suggests that, even though they could readily recognize the injustices inherent in the misperceptions of others about them and their community (development of a critical consciousness), they were not quite able to fully recognize the ways in which they had internalized some of these perceptions and the impact that internalization had on their personal

views of certain members within their own community, supporting Artz's (2001) argument that non-critical pedagogy often provides students with opportunities to identify a need, but limits their ability to recognize their own individual biases that may serve as a limitation to social justice.

### **Student Narratives**

Where the student-perceived dominant narrative was bleak, the student narratives constructed during the photovoice process often proved counter to the dominant – highlighting, to some degree, the themes of agency, capital, and belonging. Although they appeared to be sincere and honest with their identification of strengths and assets, I have to believe their narratives were somewhat informed by the focus group session. When choosing which photos to take and which stories to share, I feel the students were driven to dispel the stereotypes and assumptions of the others. This belief is based on the fact that during the interviews, when asked how their chosen photos could educate people about them or their community, ALL of the students began with a *we aren't* instead of a *we are* statement. Perhaps this is because they have indeed, to some degree, internalized the deficit perspectives that are prevalent in marginalized communities, or perhaps it was because the focus group session was still fresh in their memories and there was a righteous indignation to prove others wrong (valid or no), and maybe, a little of both. Either way, the narratives as they were told to me, despite their individual reasoning for choosing those stories to tell about themselves and their community, can, in some ways, be summarized by the initial themes of analysis - agency, capital, and belonging (as explained in Chapter 2). These three main ideas of the initial framework were a good starting place for analysis as they gave me a way to begin to think about what the students had to say. I purposefully chose each of these concepts to stand in for a complex set of ideas upon which the

project is built. In short, I needed a way to begin to make sense of the data in terms of both theory and practice, choosing these three main themes as they support the multi-faceted nature of this project. When thinking about the project as a whole (design, methods, and overall analysis), I started with these themes, but it is important to note that when working with the kids, I started with what they had to say. This distinction will become much more relevant in the upcoming discussion.

**agency.** For the purposes of this project, agency is viewed as a recognition by youth of their unique knowledge and skills to act on the world for change (refer to p. 58). When sharing their narratives, students highlighted their creativity, caring, curiosity, courage, and pride in their abilities as personal strengths. These self-identified strengths speak to students' recognition of their own attributes and this recognition in and of itself is a form of agency. Also, their anger during the focus group at the assumptions of others, assumptions that *they can't* or *aren't capable*, further reinforces this realization of agency.

**capital.** During this analysis, capital refers to Yosso's (2005) six forms of cultural wealth – aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant (refer to p. 59). Student narratives show positivity and optimism despite challenges, skills of confidence, motivation, and determination to *get ahead*, support from family, teachers, and community members and a wealth of community-based resources, a love of learning about the world, issues in the world, and knowing things about other cultures and people, strong familial knowledges taught, learned, and passed on, and perseverance despite the stigma of being “young, black, stupid, and poor.” In addition, during the focus group, students were quick to point out that what other's views of their perceived deficiencies were misguided. This also brings up an interesting finding. During the focus group and elicitation interviews that followed, students often shared

their strengths and assets in the form of capital most recognized as valuable within current educational models and by mainstream social standards. This may suggest that although students are able to recognize strengths and assets of self and community, they only recognize those attributes favored by others as strengths, hinting at the broader issue of internalization and its impacts.

**belonging.** In this project, belonging has been identified as a recognition by youth in their own situationality in order to be empowered to make change (refer to p. 60). Student narratives suggest a recognition of both cultural and place-based belonging, highlighting pride in distinct features of their community, such as the school and community libraries, new development in their neighborhood, and the river near their house, as well as a love of music, strong family values, and southern traditions of resiliency born out of a history of slavery. Students not only felt supported and accepted as a valued part of their community, they also felt nurtured and cared for by family and community. They noted that these were strengths that enabled them to not only make change but also *want* to make change.

**student-derived themes.** During the final session of the project, students conducted their own mini-analysis of their stories. They derived five themes from this analysis – family, love of learning, opportunities, resilience, and pride. Students were not aware of my pre-determined analytic themes during their own analysis; instead, they just looked for reoccurring words or phrases that had similar meaning. One notable situation involved the student-derived theme of family. Of the 70 photographs selected by the students to represent their strengths, assets, and abilities (and subsequent stories told), only one photo depicted an actual family member and only two narratives highlighted family as a strength. As seen in the findings, family

was an important attribute mentioned by many students when discussing the root-causes of their strengths but was not identified *as a strength*.

This dissonance is the likely result of my choice to take an iterative approach, respecting both youth voice and theory via concept coding and pre-determined analytic frames, whereas the student analysis did start with a blank slate, only looking for implicit and explicit themes within their own narratives. While writing the findings, I realized that my intention to use an iterative approach may have led to some heavy-handed application of the theory and while the student-derived themes *fit* within my initial pre-determined analytic themes of agency, capital, and belonging, it is interesting to think about how my interpretation and understanding of the student narratives may have been different if I had used the *student*-derived themes as the initial basis for analysis. That said, I would argue that having this existing tension between the theory and the student utterances provides more opportunity for criticality. If you just have the *student talk*, it is too easy to accept what they say on the surface. The overlapping of the theory *and* the relationship provides something special. Yet, in the end, it is possible that my analytic themes may have outlived their usefulness and although they helped me to think about my data, they may not hold as prominent a place in the end as I had assumed.

### **Photovoice and the Construction of Narratives**

In summary of the findings from the group reflection sessions, students expressed enthusiasm for the project, pride in the work they had accomplished, an awareness of their own abilities and assets (and those of their community) and demonstrated an appreciation for the use of photographic representations to help tell their stories. Yet, as positive as that sounds for the purpose of this project, there were challenges and contradictions. Students failed to mention their frustrations and often had more to say about what they were going to do with their stories

after the conclusion of this project. On one hand, this points to the potential for this process having led to a greater desire for action, but on the other, it could represent their subconscious (or conscious) desire to tell me what I wanted to hear, as suggested in the literature on response-bias when working with youth, especially given my relationship with these students (Jardine & James, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

In the preceding chapters, I have described the amazing youth that I worked with, their school, and the community they call home while attempting to let their voices shine. That said, I also recognize that there is much of me in there, too. As a teacher and a mentor invested in these kids and their community, it is inevitable that these relationships and commitments affect my work as a researcher. I have shared findings to support photovoice methodology as an effective way to create spaces for youth to express their voice within a system that often dismisses (and sometimes silences) the thoughts, dreams, and realities of those most desperate to be heard, while also providing a means, however slight, to disrupt deficit-thinking within our schools and communities. I have also shared my own observations regarding some tensions resulting from my relationship and history with these students and their community, and how that relationship influenced this study. Through this process of data collection and analysis, I worked alongside these youth as co-researchers, exploring our vulnerabilities, our insights, our realities, and working together to construct and share their stories. Although the tensions of being a collaborative partner (not quite a teacher and not merely an observer) were present throughout, my greatest challenge in conducting this study was recognizing and reconciling the tension I experienced as a practitioner versus a researcher – a dichotomous relationship between practice and theory that served as a way to enrich my interpretations of the narratives being shared (or

add complexity to their words) and my ability to understand them . In the chapter that follows, I will discuss how these findings relate to, and also challenge, the overarching theoretical underpinnings of this project, specifically democratic education and critical consciousness. I will also address the tensions manifested throughout this project and the impact they had on this study, specifically in relation to my own struggles with reconciling the theorist/practitioner dichotomy. I will conclude with implications and possible directions for future study and practical application.

## **Chapter Five**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Introduction**

When I started my doctoral program, I had been teaching in a school within a marginalized community for almost 10 years. I knew there were serious problems and had seen first-hand the negative effects these problems had on my students' thinking, their academic performance, teacher morale, and the overall climate of the school, families, and community. They went far beyond my class, the school, and the particular community but I wasn't exactly sure of the nature of these problems. One reason I decided to enter my PhD program was to be able to explore and identify what I was seeing and experiencing and also, ways to limit the resulting effects on my students and their community. Once I started learning about deficit and possibility perspectives, the problems my students, school, and the community were experiencing began to become clearer and so did what I wanted to study. I knew that a single research study could not *fix* the problem, as there are numerous variables at play, yet I was hopeful that I might find alternative methods or collaborative strategies that would begin to dismantle deficit-thinking at the student-perspective level.

As a practitioner of critical service learning in K-12 education, I understood the benefits of such a pedagogy on student academic outcomes, civic engagement, and youth empowerment, yet I was less clear on how this pedagogy could be useful for promoting a possibilities perspective in marginalized schools and communities. For this reason, I chose to conduct an exploratory, qualitative study using photovoice methodology as a form of critical service

learning. The literature provided a wealth of information on the prevalence of deficit-thinking in schools and communities and the benefits of using photovoice methods with marginalized students and communities (as described in Chapter 2), but very little on the use of photovoice as a form of critical service learning, and even less on the use of photovoice as critical service learning to disrupt deficit-thinking.

Although I was an accepted member of the community and had close relationships with my students and their families, providing a unique positionality that afforded me relatively direct access to deficit-thinking, I was not in a position to assume the narratives students would construct about themselves and their communities. I did know, from working with the students on numerous critical service-learning projects in the past, that they were well aware of the injustices surrounding and impacting them, their school, and their community, but I was less aware to what extent these presumed deficits and injustices had been internalized. This lack of awareness informed my research questions, as the first step in addressing deficit-thinking was to examine what narratives students construct about their identity, their community, their sense of belonging within their community, and their ability to be change-agents. Given the stifling effects of deficit-thinking and the negative impacts of marginalization as seen in the literature (Scheurich & Laible, 1995; Valencia, 1997; Yosso, 2005; Paris, 2012; Simone, 2012), I felt it was necessary to create discursive spaces for the construction of these narratives as well as spaces for the narratives to be heard once they had been realized. Photovoice, the very act of taking pictures to represent realities, provided such a discursive space and the use of photo elicitation and collaborative reflection and analysis provided additional space for the stories to be recognized.

As this study was designed and conducted through a possibilities-perspective lens, the use of an adapted version of photovoice methodology (emphasizing positives instead of negatives), allowed me to identify any difficulties students may have experienced in recognizing their own strengths and assets, as well as the strengths and assets of those around them. If the students had a difficult time recognizing their own strengths and assets it might help show they had indeed internalized deficit thinking (perspectives) and by recognizing this about themselves, they could begin to disrupt this way of thinking or at a minimum, begin to look at things differently, giving them a way (and a space) to move beyond focusing on perceived inadequacies. It was not within the purpose and scope of this project to explore how creation of spaces nor the construction and circulation of narratives impact the students and their community in a transformational sense through prospective broader actions, but rather to study whether the use of photovoice as critical service learning can serve to open up discursive spaces and whether the youth themselves would be more likely (or better equipped) to disrupt the dominant narratives and perceptions currently surrounding marginalized youth and their communities. To determine the usefulness of such a study, and find a balance between encouraging the students in their excitement to change the word but also looking for the benefits to students even if the end result does not disrupt these narratives, I drew upon the critical constructs of democratic education and critical consciousness, providing a way of thinking about how the current perspectives within education and the structure of schooling can be used as a basis for civic engagement and possibility perspectives, especially with marginalized students, schools, and communities.

As a researcher, this explains why I felt this study was valuable, why specific theoretical and conceptual frames were selected, and how the methods chosen best answered my research

questions, but it is important to realize that I was not alone in this study. I was not merely researching youth, I was researching *with* youth and perhaps at times throughout this study I leaned too far one way or the other. As you will see below, the tensions that I felt as I navigated the dichotomy of being both a researcher and a practitioner influenced the outcomes of this study in numerous ways, not necessarily in overtly negative ways, but in sometimes subtle ways that shaped the direction of the study, my analysis of the data, and my overall ability to interpret the findings in a more critical way. This tension is not uncommon, as the literature points to examples of similar tensions experienced by those conducting research with youth, especially as a quasi-insider (Bertrand, 2012; Baldrige, 2012; Brantlinger, 2013; Delgado, 2015).

As a new doctoral student, I struggled with moving away from a practitioner perspective to more of a theoretical view. I was a teacher and I thought like a teacher and this practitioner mindset, a mindset shaped in part by the neo-liberal structural forces at play in current educational practices (high stakes testing, stringent teacher-accountability measures, and structural classism and racism), practices that I was determined to *overcome*, shaped how I viewed the world and how I approached complex problems and addressed potential solutions. I found it difficult to look at things from a more critical, scholarly orientation no matter how much I wanted to view things differently. After spending more than two years adapting to this way of thought, I had finally become somewhat comfortable with this new role and I embraced the challenges of exploring the world around me through an educational researcher lens, digging deeper into critical theory and educational frameworks. At that point, as I designed and actually conducted this study, another shift occurred. As I sat in the classroom with the students, it became easy to slip back into the practitioner role. It was comfortable, and simple, and almost felt like *coming home*.

I recognized this shift in myself early on and tried to use deep reflection to at least keep one foot in the practitioner mindset and one foot in the researcher role, but that did not always happen. In the year leading up to the start of the data collection process, I had immersed myself in the literature on the collaborative partner role and felt knowledgeable about recognizing and understanding the pitfalls when undertaking youth participatory research, especially as somewhat of an insider. As DeWalt & DeWalt (2011) made clear, this role makes it “difficult to attend to the level of detail necessary to gain new insight” (p. 88). At the beginning of this study, I had high hopes that I would be able to address this issue simply by using observation, memoing, and my new-found grasp of theoretical foundations to look critically for new insights and new explanations and, in some ways, this did occur. Yet, after a careful review of data collection, analysis, and findings, I am forced to question exactly how much my relationship with the students, my own background, and my inability to fully realize the collaborative partner role affected this study. Code-switching from teacher, to scholar, to collaborative partner, and back to scholar was challenging to say the least, especially when so much of my own identity and perceptions are tied to that of the practitioner.

Certainly, my status as White, middle-class female has also influenced how I interpreted and applied meaning to the students’ statements. Although I have worked with these particular students for several years and have a close relationship with them and their families, and having been a part of this particular school and community for over a decade, I would be remiss to think these factors completely erase internal bias ingrained by my race, class, and social upbringing. I reflected on the potential influence of these cultural/demographic factors throughout the process and feel that its impact was minimal, but I also know that it was present, as I can never fully understand what it means to be, to think, and to feel as my students do.

Alternatively, I also think my relationship with the students allowed for more open discussion as students were not afraid to open up and be honest with themselves, each other, or me. In some respects, it allowed me to pay closer attention to what they said and what they meant. Knowing these students and having a personal understanding of how they talk, their nuanced actions, and how they express themselves best, helped me to not only better understand what they were saying, but also to recognize and explore what they weren't saying.

One notable way that this tension manifested was in the data analysis process. I initially took the students' narratives at face value alone as I wanted to remain true to them, their words, and notions and felt that my relationship with them allowed me this opportunity, yet after a more critical reflection, I realized that I was putting almost all of the emphasis on student perceptions (the practitioner mindset again) and only tenuously applying my analytic frames. This likely stems from two things: 1) my conscious belief in the power of youth voice and that what the students told me was sincere and deserved to be highlighted, and 2) my subconscious (dis)comfort level in being able to apply the theoretical frames adequately to fully capture *community*. This recognition brought about a more critical review and presentation of the findings in subsequent drafts, and thus, Chapter 4 and more so the discussions here, are a direct result of this re-framing.

### **Reconsidering the Theoretical Frames**

Democratic education is seen as the emphasis of using the educative process to shape the social world and make a positive difference in society through democratic action. According to a Deweyan view of democracy, the efforts people in marginalized communities undertake to participate in broader public spheres are an important source of dynamism that drives a democracy (Stemhagen, 2016a). One reason for the use of Dewey's notion of democratic

education in this project is the focus on students' choice and agency, as Stemhagen (2016b) surmises that Dewey's vision of education "would foster children's recognition that newly acquired skills and knowledge equipped them to act on the world – and instilled a desire to do so" (p. 107). This frame was most helpful in my efforts to look beyond the practitioner's concerns and to embrace more of a theoretical stance, as it allowed me to realize just what type of education I would like to see in the world. It served to help me envision what *could be* instead of remaining stuck in *what is*.

Critical consciousness assumes that one can use their own experience and their perception of reality, from both a historical and social stance, to gain knowledge, thus gaining power, to address social inequalities through action that leads to change (Freire, 1970, Desyllas, 2010; Roberts, 2012). Deimer and Li (2011) state,

*Critical consciousness* represents how oppressed individuals critically "read" and act to change their social conditions, and consists of critical reflection and critical action ...components help[ing] marginalized youth overcome structural constraints on human agency, or to serve as an "antidote" to structural oppression. (p. 1815)

It is important to highlight a shift in tone here. In my dissertation proposal, the purpose of the focus group (although foundationally the same) was discussed in objective and depersonalized ways—the exact language was of *extracting data* and designing *interventions*. The act of engaging in this project allowed my commitment to the power of youth voice to become more deeply solidified and clarified. This shift represents a change from an objective/procedural orientation to a participatory/reflective one. This is yet another example of the tensions and overlapping prioritizations realized in trying to be fully present as both a researcher and a practitioner/supporter – to hold true to the scholarly purpose of the study while

also promoting the power of the students' words and perceptions. The discussion that follows reflects this shift from research objectivity toward youth empowerment.

For this project, the focus group served as a vehicle to give youth a voice in identifying and critically reflecting on their perceptions of reality – perceptions of how others view them and their community. Through this process, youth gave voice to the social inequality inherent in misperceptions, stereotypes, and assumptions by others, specifically reading the perceptions of others as perpetuation of their own social conditions (and in some ways as perpetuation of their marginalization). As seen in the findings, the students' based their perceptions of how others viewed them on their own personal experiences and the experiences of those around them, collectively gaining knowledge about their own social conditions. Throughout this session, I observed the potential for a shift in power as the youth became more empowered and emboldened to point out these inequalities based on race, age, and where they live/go to school. In the beginning, Liam said he thought people viewed their school as “ghetto” and another student said, “I can't believe you just said that.... but it is true”, and another chimed in (asking me), “well, it is true, they do think that, but can we say that?” After providing them with an affirmation that they could express whatever they wanted, it seemed the floodgates were opened and they freely began to share their thoughts and feelings. Group effect (Carey, 1994) became apparent as they shared more and more of their experiences, and the purpose of the project, according to the youth, became a way for them to tell their own *counter* stories to disrupt the negative perceptions surrounding them and their community. By the end of the session, they were determined to highlight their strengths and assets as a way to *prove others wrong* and tell the *true* story of themselves, their school, and their community. Freire (1970) states,

One of the gravest obstacles to the achievement of liberation is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness. Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. (p. 51)

This session also served as one way to consider to what extent the perceived oppressive thoughts of others had been internalized by the youth. Would they be able to recognize the thoughts and perceptions of others as a form of oppression or did they believe these thoughts about themselves and their community? It quickly became apparent that they were able, to some degree, to recognize these false perceptions as injustices and were beginning to emerge from it and turn upon it. To me, it seemed they were taking steps toward their readiness to write a *new* narrative of freedom and power (Roberts, 2012) but first, they needed a way for these new narratives to be realized.

### **From Theory to Practice**

#### **Creation of Discursive Spaces**

One of the foundational tenants of critical service learning is reciprocal collaboration—partnerships that mutually address the needs of both parties involved with regard to structural injustice (Maybach, 1996; Israel, et al., 1998; Artz, 2001; Mitchell, 2008; Bringle, Clayton, & Price, 2009). In this project, two primary needs were identified. First, students as active participants felt a need to dispel negative stereotypes surrounding them and their community by telling their stories of strengths and assets as a way to potentially alter perceptions within the broader community. In truly collaborative work, some key features aren't laid out at the onset by the researcher, and I knew I couldn't fully realize their needs until talking with them. Second, as

a researcher, I saw a need to provide a way for students to create and share these narratives to reinforce possibility perspectives within the students themselves, hopefully leading to an effective strategy for addressing deficit-thinking in schools and communities. Photovoice was determined to be one such way to address both of these needs.

Photovoice is a methodology “by which people identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang, Yuan, & Feng, 1996, p. 47). Through use of this technique, photographs have the power to conceptualize the everyday lived experience, allowing for a heightened sense of critical consciousness and “aims to give power, through images and conversations, to those who are often not heard or included in decisions” (Malloy, 2007, p. 42). Thus, photovoice has potential for opening discursive spaces for marginalized youth to create narratives counter to the dominant, therefore “changing the way their public presence is defined” (Wang & Pies, 2008, 185).

In alignment with service-learning standards of quality practice (NYLC, 2008) and the methodological foundations of photovoice (Wang, 1999), the students and I worked collaboratively to identify both their needs (counter negative stereotypes by highlighting strengths and assets) and my own (provide a space for the construction of narratives). This project also challenged power differentials by providing opportunity for the students to be co-researchers, to see me as an equal in some regards as opposed to an authority figure, while also challenging the traditional hierarchical structures prevalent in schools and the broader community. Throughout the project, students were given multiple opportunities for individual and group reflection to assess, processes, gain greater insight, and recognize their own situationality. Most importantly, students utilized the power of their own voices by having the opportunity to choose what to photograph, to interpret their photos in their own authentic voice,

and to construct their own narratives about themselves and their community. Thus, the claim that photovoice can be a viable form of critical service learning was largely supported.

Where this project fell short in fully recognizing photovoice as a form of critical service learning, however, is in the *action*. On one hand, the act of taking photographs and the processes following, are indeed action, yet when looking at the bigger, more critical picture, action should also be considered as the *resulting* action. Critical action is not just any action; it is specifically concerned with those potentially leading to community change. In this case, taking the photos served as the method but did not lead to a tangible resulting action for community change, even though the process may have inspired the desire to take future action (which in itself demonstrates agency). While I feel this project is meaningful and has potential to bring about change, in the full spirit of the Freirean critical framework, the project technically lacks the actual transformation of unequal social structures. If I had elected to follow through with the final steps of the photovoice process – dissemination in this sense – then perhaps I could claim that in this context, photovoice did fully serve as critical service learning. As conducted, there is no way to determine what actions students may have taken or what (if any) resulting transformation in *others* perceptions may have occurred. This may be a result of a deficiency of my project or in the conceptualization of how critical researchers would define critical service learning, but that is beyond the scope of this project. Although the findings of this study suggest that it was an effective design to set the stage for future individual and/or community transformation, the results do not meet the claim of fully recognizing critical consciousness as hoped with photovoice as a form of critical service learning, as the critical *transformative action* piece is missing. Yes, my adapted version of photovoice as a form of critical service learning did create a space for the construction of narratives, but it failed to create a space for the

circulation of these narratives outside of themselves and the research, as there was no means within the scope of the project for the students to share their stories within their own and the broader community.

This study has potential value for other researchers of progressive education and critical service learning as they will be the ones reading it, but it is not likely it will be read by those living and attending school in the marginalized community from which it originated. This is and should be recognized as somewhat of a design flaw for as Freire (1970) suggests, in research for social change, communities are active participants in inquiry, not mere objects of it. Imasiku (2014) further highlights this issue “as allowing the research to create social movements *on* the participants rather than *with* the participants” (p. 188). This is an example of an instance that I leaned too far towards the researcher perspective. In designing this study, I was aware of the importance of youth voice but I was often more aware of the time constraints and theoretical musings of myself as researcher, which led to dismissing a vital part of youth participatory research, the potential impact on the study design of what the youth had to say and how that might shape the project. By not allowing an opportunity for youth narratives to circulate beyond these pages, I am forced to question to what degree the youth will benefit and what greater benefits may have been possible if things were done differently.

### **Construction of Counter Narratives**

Findings suggest that students were able to construct narratives of possibility, recognizing the strengths and assets of themselves and their community, as well as recognizing instances of injustice. In the preceding chapter, I discussed briefly how photovoice might have heightened this issues-based awareness of injustice within the students themselves, leading to a greater degree of critical consciousness. This critical consciousness development can be seen through

Izzy's narrative describing the resilience of her community as a direct by-product of the institutional oppression of slavery and Bella's narrative showing recognition of structural inequality (a lack of resources) that has led to less jobs, greater need, and higher rates of poverty and unemployment in her community than in other communities. Both students noted that they did not make these connections until they were interpreting their pictures representing strengths and assets. As Freire (1970) suggests, providing tools for critical reflection through dialogue (in this case, photo documentation and elicitation), marginalized students will be able to "gradually perceive his social and personal reality as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it" (p. 13).

### **Internalization of Deficits *and* Strengths**

After a more critical review of the project as a whole, I began to realize that the entire project hinged on one critical assumption: the assumption that because these students lived in a marginalized community and attended a marginalized school, they had internalized deficit-perspectives and would easily be able to recognize this internalization and, if given the space, they would be able to highlight their capital and agency to construct narratives counter to the dominant. The literature aligned with the findings from the student-derived dominant narrative of what they perceived others thought of them as this narrative was representative of how others view marginalized students, schools, and communities (Kohn, 2004; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammarota, 2006; Duncan-Andrade, 2007; Noguera, 2003, 2009, & 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010, Valencia, 2010; Paris, 2012). What this assumption failed to recognize, however, was not that these students had, to some degree, internalized elements of the deficit-perspectives surrounding them and their community, but rather to what degree these students had internalized mainstream (white, middle-class) notions of strengths and assets. The student-narratives support

that they could recognize that they did not possess the negative characteristics of the dominant narrative such as lazy, uninterested in school, didn't care about their community, etc., but more enlightening are the ways students implicitly and explicitly talked about their strengths.

The student-highlighted strengths and assets of self and community often (implicitly and explicitly) portrayed strengths that are valued by mainstream society such as good behavior, academic achievement recognized through the winning of awards and hard-work, a nice looking, clean neighborhood, and resources provided by others. These representations point to the desirable strengths accepted by current paradigms but I rarely heard students mention other forms of less-valued capital. These findings are important as they align with the literature on resistance theory, and more specifically, what Solórzano & Delgado Bernal (2001) refer to as *conformist resistance*.

[This type of resistance] refers to the oppositional behavior of students who are motivated by a need for social justice yet hold no critique of the systems of oppression. In other words, these students choose to strive towards social justice within the existing social systems and social conventions. (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 318)

These findings led me to a deeper critique of the original assumptions driving this project, mainly that the youth would inherently be able to recognize their own capital, specifically the capital they possessed that is less valued in society. This assumption is one with which Cammarota (2011) has noted as being an issue with possibility-based approaches to urban youth development. He states,

Although young people have the possibility to overcome political and economic problems, it is still wrong to assume, similarly to a problem-based perspective, that possibilities somehow emerge from an ingrained pathology. Young people can acquire

special assets, such as artistic creativity or intellectual analysis, to enhance their existence, but they are not any more given than being born left-handed as opposed to right-handed. They must cultivate possibilities and assets in the same way they attain and build knowledge. Although humans are born with the potential for intellectual thought, it must be harnessed, enacted, and refined and provided with the space to evolve. (p. 832)

### **What it *Means* to be a Community Youth Advocate and Education Researcher**

These findings provide an understanding of what is valued in schools (and more broadly in society). As a teacher and member of this society, it leaves me thinking about the ways in which current educational policy (standards-based accountability measures for both students and teachers) serves to shape our practice and our understandings of success. These notions of success are not only perpetuated through policy, but also within our schools of education in how we train new teachers to view success, and how in turn, shape our students' ideals of what success looks like. For example, based on the students' own analysis of the data, *family* emerged as a dominant theme and although they did not take pictures specifically representing family as a strength, perhaps this indicates that they hold more types of community cultural wealth that was not represented by the pictures they did take. That said, perhaps they chose to not represent these other types of wealth because they have internalized the mainstream notions of what strength looks like and can't recognize these other facets of themselves and their community as capital, or perhaps what they did represent could have been interpreted differently if I had been more aware of the limitations possibly created by the degree to which my own internalization manifested in beliefs about what is valued and valid in schools and society.

These disconnects point to two main ideas that allow this study to leverage the research we already have to inform practice: 1) Recognition by marginalized students, as opposed to those

studying marginalized students, of manifestations of internalized deficit-thinking; 2)

Internalization, by both marginalized students/communities and researchers, of socially accepted norms, practices, and beliefs valued by society. The findings support there is some degree of internalization of deficit-thinking (for example their use of the word *ghetto* and the acceptance that there is some truth in what others think about them and their community), and further support this photovoice method as a way to allow them the space to construct narratives of possibility to counter deficit-thinking, yet the main issue I see is in realizing what *possibility* means to them and to researchers studying this phenomenon. My review of the findings from this study suggest that the students' ideas of *possibility* may be limited by what mainstream dominant society and neoliberal education reforms support as possibility. To some degree, this phenomenon also seems to have been true for myself as researcher.

Through this project, I had to figure out how to become the kind of researcher that would allow my genuine care and concern for these kids to come through. From the beginning, I wanted to design and conduct research that *matters*, not merely research that is published or fits neatly into a traditional higher-education mold of what education research *should* be. In discussing edits with my chair, it was brought to my attention that I had used the terms *extract information* and *intervention* when discussing my methodology – typical terms used inside mainstream education research paradigms (research *on*, not *with*) yet counter to my desire to conduct research that was both relational and community-engagement focused. Thus, tensions arise and the resistance I saw in myself is similar to resistance seen in the parallel tensions between the two fields (Community Engagement and Education Research). For example, earlier drafts showed inconsistencies in my tone and in my approach of the initial analysis. These inconsistencies are a direct result of the personal struggle I felt in switching roles between the

education researcher and the community youth advocate. I am the researcher, yes, but in other situations, I am a caring and committed member of the community. One of the greatest things to come out of this for me were the questions that arose through exploration of these tensions about methodology and this type of education research – I understand the theoretical component was necessary but it was difficult for some of the theory and methods to be oppositional to the relational and community. These questions support a need for schools, educators, and policy-makers to not only promote moving beyond learning by doing, for students' sakes, but to also support new research and methods that provide alternatives to the traditional modes of both learning and doing in order to cultivate possibilities beyond these traditional assumptions.

### **Implications**

#### **For the Researcher**

This study aligns with the existing literature on critical service learning, photovoice, and deficit-thinking and it offers new insights in a number of valuable ways. For the education researcher, it makes a case for considering the possibility of some Deweyan scholarship to contribute to critical theory and pedagogy, adding to the literature supporting Dewey's role as a foundation for service learning and experiential education and supporting claims found in current literature that Dewey's educational philosophies are not necessarily contrary to critical philosophies but can serve as a way to bring the community into the classroom in meaningful ways, especially for marginalized youth (Roberts, 2005; Stickers, 2010, Levinson, 2011; Stenhagen, 2016a). Democratic education, in this representation, has the potential to increase meaning-making for students while also improving culturally-responsive practice for teachers, leading to a more democratic, liberatory experiences in schools and communities.

When thinking about directions for further study and in light of my discussion above, I see a need for a more critical review of the literature on possibility-perspectives in schools and communities. Who gets to define possibility? What does possibility look like and how is that view influenced by internalization of valued societal standards? The literature that is available posits possibility as the opposite of deficit, providing opportunities for students and educators to recognize potential as opposed to highlighting inadequacies, and although there is research on the impact of assumptions, I am still left with a desire for more. I think this is where there is a need for more work on what internalization actually looks like in a practical manifestation for both students and teachers and what it may mean for democratic education and transformational social change.

To this end, one area of further study that may warrant attention is how (and if) internalization of deficit-thinking is recognized by marginalized students themselves and what that may mean for the outcomes of projects such as this one. For example, the findings from this study indicate students were able to recognize injustices and *act* on those injustices by constructing narratives counter to the dominant. Yet, the findings also suggest that the students were less likely to recognize the degree to which (if any) their perceived strengths and assets were their own ideals or reproductions of what school and society teaches them (or deems) as *good*. Finding effective ways to help students recognize the ways in which they had internalized this deficit-thinking (and notions of strengths and assets), could provide an alternative starting point for exploring the ways in which the structure of schooling perpetuates inequality.

Photovoice as a methodology is most often used as a viable (and acceptable) way to research community-driven projects. It is less likely, however, to be recognized as an effective method in education research yet schools and communities are intricately linked. It is my belief

that this project can offer education researchers *a new way of seeing* – using photovoice as way to capture those attributes often difficult to ascertain through traditionally accepted methods. One such way would be the use of photovoice with in-service teachers. Like students, teachers working in marginalized schools/communities are also faced with deficit-perspectives - they are faced daily with failing test scores, a lack of accreditation, constant observations that point out what they are doing *wrong* as opposed to what they are doing *right*, and an influx of rules and regulations that often demean notions of professionalism in the field. This project has shown promise for disrupting deficit-thinking (regardless of the degree to which that has been realized) in students and may therefore, be a viable method to explore and potentially disrupt (or at best bring light to) the internalization of deficit-thinking in teachers – about both themselves, their practice, and the ways in which they view their students, schools, and profession.

### **For the Practitioner**

This study also offers valuable insight into photovoice as more than a methodology used to study students and action, as it supports photovoice *as* critical service learning. This could help to disrupt the status-quo of community engagement in schools by offering an alternative that moves away from what is often offered - project-based learning (at best) to charity-based, oppressive practices (at worst).

In schools and classrooms, service learning often manifests in the hypothetical (especially in marginalized schools faced with strict accountability, accreditation, and financial barriers). Students may be asked to think critically to meet community needs but are less often given the actual opportunity to turn those ideas into tangible action. For example, teachers may assign a project asking students to research food insecurity in their community and write a letter to the city mayor demanding change. Unfortunately, that letter may never actually reach the mayor's

office as, once graded, it becomes another assignment in a binder and is forgotten about once the grade has been given. On the other end of the spectrum, students may create a donation drive to address food insecurity by collecting peanut butter for a local food bank. Let's say they collect 800 jars of peanut butter, but unfortunately, the food bank does not need peanut butter and no one collaborated with them ahead of time to find out the real needs of the food bank or the community. These are both true examples of my days in the classroom and they are not singular incidents. Visiting classrooms and hosting professional development sessions for school divisions across the country has shown me that this is common practice.

Photovoice as critical service learning is an instructional method that actively fosters students' agency, choice, and voice, and provides an outlet for that voice to be realized and action taken. For those schools and teachers wanting to provide students with opportunities for authentically, collaboratively meeting the needs of their community, photovoice could provide a new instructional tool for reaching, understanding, and supporting those most vulnerable while also supporting social justice education. I can see this as most accessible to social studies and language arts teachers as civic awareness, action, and narratives are among national standards in these contents. That said, this could be a powerful way for all schools and educators to cultivate a recognition of the less-valued capital of their students and allow space for students to make connections between their own lived experiences and the curriculum, truly utilizing the power of public education to transform students, schools, and communities.

### **Limitations**

This study was conducted in one community, one school, and with only seven students. Further studies on students in other schools throughout this community, with more student participants, and/or in other similar communities would likely yield different results. Different

contexts and settings may provide valuable insights into different perceptions of what it means to be marginalized from a deficit-perspective and what possibility/success represents, various levels of internalization, and different dominant and student constructed narratives surrounding similar populations. By considering data collected across multiple schools and with a variety of students identified as marginalized, further studies may offer greater insights into the questions raised throughout this study. It would also be valuable to compare this study to similar studies with similar populations and settings conducted by someone not closely linked to the students and study site. I consider my positionality in this study to be both a strength and a weakness yet it would be valuable to see what narratives students construct without an insider for a collaborative partner.

Another limitation was the heavy use of deductive analysis using the pre-determined analytic concepts derived from the theoretical constructs, even though the students conducted their own analysis, which would have served as an inductive dual starting point and might have provided opportunity for more critical examination of the data. In designing this project, I hoped to highlight youth voice yet it was only through actually conducting the study that I was able to realize more fully the importance of all aspects of youth voice in these types of projects.

Lastly, I can't help but to recognize how a strong focus on strengths and assets and a de-emphasis of problems may have shaped students' responses. The nature of this study assumes that the students are well aware of the injustices in their lives and, due to deficit thinking, have less awareness of their own strengths and assets (and that may have been shown to be true to a degree) but through this specific project design, some depth and breadth of the underlying issues of marginalization may have been lost. To get to justice, we need to first bring to light and

understand injustice. Although there were certainly additional limitations, those have been discussed in detail in the proceeding chapters.

### **Conclusion: From Deficits to Possibilities...and Beyond**

This study was very personal for me, as I have worked with the students, teachers, and families in this community for over a decade. Seeing my students' enthusiasm at getting to tell their story, choosing what to tell and how to tell it, reminds me of why I wanted to be an educator in the first place. I believe in their strengths and I believe in their ability and desire to make the world a better place. Sharing that enthusiasm with them as they worked through this process, witnessing that agency develop and grow, has been an amazing and enlightening journey, a journey that has reinforced my belief that youth have the power to write a new narrative of possibility for themselves and their community if we will only listen and act. At the conclusion of this study, the students were already planning their *big reveal* – a community gallery showing of their photographs and stories. When I asked if they would like to be present to share their stories in person or if they would like me to use the pseudonyms shared in this text, they all expressed a strong desire to share their photos and stories in person. One student said, “I’m usually nervous speaking in front of a bunch of people but these are my pictures and my story and I’m proud of the work I did...I want people to know that I did this!” Another said, “I want people to put a face with a name and realize this is who we are and maybe that will change their ideas about us.” Excitedly, another expressed, “When is our next photovoice project? What are we going to research next time?” Hearing their sentiments, their pride in their work, their desire to continue this path as *researchers*, and their belief that this work has the potential to disrupt the perceptions of others (and possibly lead to greater change), gave me a renewed

faith in the power of youth voice, critical consciousness, and the potential of creating a more aware and (hopefully) just society.

As a researcher, this project lit a fire in me to think more critically about not only the ways we work with youth, but also the ways with which we study youth and community, especially marginalized students, schools, and communities, and how the two (working with and studying youth) inter-relate. I am excited to use this method with other research interests and other groups. For example, how could this method be used with teachers working in marginalized schools? How might this method be used with students in higher education to recognize the benefits of specific programs or service learning partnerships? How might this method be used with community partners to deepen relationships between all stakeholders? How might this method be used with students (and pre-/in-service teachers) in K-12 to deepen understanding of the curriculum and/or identify strengths/weaknesses within teaching and learning?

As I write this final draft, reflecting heavily on the power of youth voice and what it means for the future of our public schools (and our society), I am inundated with images of kids, high school students, who in the last few weeks walked out of classrooms amidst threats of suspension and then stood in front of our Nation (and the world), demanding change and not backing down to those who said they couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't. This begs the question, if a main purpose of public education is to promote and develop skills that allow students to be actively engaged in a democracy, what are we as researchers and educators doing to make it happen. Writing about the student activism that has emanated at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in the weeks following the school shooting there, Dahlia Lithwick (writing for SLATE Magazine online, 2018) argues:

there is simply no way to construct a conspiracy theory around the fact that students who were being painstakingly taught about drama, media, free speech, political activism, and forensics became the epicenter of the school-violence crisis and handled it creditably. These kids aren't prodigiously gifted. They've just had the gift of the kind of education we no longer value. Extracurricular education—one that focuses on skills beyond standardized testing and rankings—creates passionate citizens who are spring-loaded for citizenship. (no page #)

We should not be focused on *creating* change-makers – the change-makers are already here. The real focus should be on providing the sort of education that cultivates the skills and abilities in our youth to channel learning and experience into democratic action and participation. The students and staff at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School should not be the exception when we talk about the kind of education our students deserve and the results of that education – they should be the norm. Now, in this moment, as our kids stand up and speak out, schools will be forced to address the purposes of public schooling and can no longer hide behind accountability measures and initiatives that do not work. New ways of envisioning, learning, and doing will be required, as students have shown they *will* act. It is now up to us to provide an education that teaches them and encourages them how to do that in the true ethos of democratic community engagement. Perhaps this study will open doors for students, teachers, schools, policy-makers, and communities to imagine a system otherwise...and act on, and for, it. In this spirit, the students and I are proud to present our story to you, not the story of others or what they might think about us, but our story, who “We Are...”

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## APPENDIX A<sup>i</sup>

### Invitation to Participate

(Sample Email)

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s) and Student(s):

Your child has been selected to participate in an exciting youth photovoice project titled, “We Are...” to highlight the strengths and assets of our community. This unique opportunity is a research project facilitated by Amanda Hall and directed by Dr. Kurt Stenhagen of Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education with approval and support from [REDACTED] County Public Schools. Your child is eligible to participate because 1) they attend [REDACTED] Middle School and 2) they have participated in a critical service learning program at the school for at least two years.

During this project, students will be given cameras and asked to document the strengths and assets of self and community. To participate, students must:

- Take part in all trainings and learn about taking photographs.
- Take pictures of things that are important to them in their life and community.
- Meet with other participants and/or researchers during five phases to discuss their own and each other’s photographs. As part of the project, observation notes and/or audio recordings will be taken during these sessions.
- Participate in an interview to explain their photographs to the researcher.

Timeline of Project:

- April 1 (9am – 12noon)
- April 5 (3:30pm – 5:30pm)
- April 8 (9am – 12noon)
- April 17 (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
- April 24 (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
- May 1 (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
- May 8 (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
- individual interview scheduled between May 9 – May 19 (2 hr session)
- May 20 (9am – 12noon)
- May 27 (9am – 12noon)

If you are interested in your child participating in this project or would like more information, please plan to attend an information session on May 27<sup>th</sup> at 6pm in the [REDACTED] Library. This session will explain the purpose of the study, what is expected of students, and address any ethical concerns you may have.

Feel free to reach out to me if you have any immediate questions or concerns or if you are unable to attend the meeting but would like more information.

Thank you,  
Amanda Hall  
Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education  
Hallaf2@vcu.edu

## APPENDIX B

### Participant Assent/Consent Forms

#### Youth Assent Form

A Virginia Commonwealth University and  
[REDACTED] County Public Schools Photovoice Project

Project Title: "We Are..."  
Project Directors: Amanda Hall, Doctoral Candidate & Kurt Stemhagen, PhD  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Project Partner: [REDACTED] County Public Schools

You are invited to take part in a research project conducted by Amanda Hall, Doctoral Candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education. In this research project, you and other participants will take pictures and tell stories about the strengths of your community. This is a chance for you to teach others about your life.

If you decide to be part of the research project, you will be asked to:

- Take part in a training and learn about taking photographs.
- Take pictures of things that are important to you in your life and community.
- Meet with other participants and/or researchers for all five phases of this project to discuss each other's photographs. As part of the project, discussion sessions will be audio or video taped and notes will be taken.
- Participate in an interview to explain your photographs to the researcher.

If you agree to participate, you will be given a digital camera for taking pictures during the project. You will get to keep the digital camera if you participate fully in the photovoice project. If you miss two or more Photovoice sessions, you will be removed from the project and required to return the camera to the project staff within one week of the second missed session. If the camera is not returned during this timeframe, you will be required to reimburse the project for the full cost of the camera (\$30).

\_\_\_\_\_(initial) I will return the digital camera to project staff if I miss two or more photovoice sessions.

All of the photos that you take as a part of the photovoice project are yours. You have full ownership of the photos and have the right to decide which ones will be used for public

display. With your permission, some of your photographs will be used for this project. Your name will never be used other than during discussions unless you wish to use your first name or a pseudo-name (a made-up name to protect your real identity). At any time, you may ask us not use any specific photograph(s) or parts of your story. If you wish to participate in the project and do not want your photographs or stories used for research, you may do so. You may also withdraw from the project at any time and there will be no negative consequences.

If you withdraw, you will be asked to return your digital camera within one week of withdrawal or pay the camera cost of (\$30). All sessions will be held at ██████ Middle School, ██████ in Room █. Transportation will not be provided but if transportation is an issue, please contact Ms. Hall or Dr. Stemhagen (see contact info below).

If you have any questions about the project, you or your parent may contact the following people: Amanda Hall 804-█████ ([hallaf2@vcu.edu](mailto:hallaf2@vcu.edu)) OR Dr. Kurt Stemhagen 804-█████ ([krstemhagen@vcu.edu](mailto:krstemhagen@vcu.edu))

By signing this form, you agree to fully participate in the “We Are...” Photovoice Project by doing the following activities:

- o Attend all photovoice sessions:
  - Phase I:
    - Training Session #1: (9am – 12noon)
    - Participant Focus Group: (3:30pm – 5:30pm)
    - Training Session #2: (9am – 12noon)
  - Phase II:
    - Weekly Discussion Session #1: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
    - Weekly Discussion Session #2: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
    - Weekly Discussion Session #3: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
    - Weekly Discussion Session #4: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  - Phase III:
    - Individual interviews (2 hr session) \*Follow-up interviews may be scheduled as needed.
  - Phase IV:
    - Group Reflection Session: (9am – 12noon)
  - Phase V:
    - Group Analysis Session: (9am – 12noon)
- o Stay for the full session duration
- o Arrive on time to each session.
- o Take full responsibility for maintaining and protecting a digital camera.
- o Take pictures of your community.
- o Discuss your pictures with others in the group.
- o Have your thoughts tape-recorded for the project.
- o Complete all activities and evaluation forms throughout the project.
- o Follow project rules and guidelines.

Remember, your participation is completely voluntary. Signing this paper means that you have read this and that you want to be in the research project. This is your decision and it is OK if you choose not to participate and don't sign the paper or if you change your mind later.

Print Name of  
Participant:

---

Signature of  
Participant:  
Witness:

Date:  
  
Date:

Thanks for your time and help!  
This project is a collaboration between Virginia Commonwealth  
University, School of Education and [REDACTED] County Public  
Schools  
The project is directed by Amanda Hall and Dr. Kurt Stemhagen

## Parent/Guardian Consent Form for Youth Participants

A Virginia Commonwealth University and

██████████ County Public Schools Photovoice Project

Project Title: "We Are..."  
Project Directors: Amanda Hall, Doctoral Candidate & Kurt Stenhagen, PhD  
Virginia Commonwealth University  
Project Partner: ██████████ County Public Schools

Your child has been invited to take part in a research project conducted by Amanda Hall, Doctoral Candidate at Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education. In this research project, your child will take pictures and meet with other youth participants to discuss strengths of their community. This is a chance for your child to teach others about his/her life.

This project will also provide the youth participants the opportunity to recognize the importance of their voices and opinions, in addition to bringing greater community awareness to their experiences and assets through their photographs. Your child was asked to be a part of this project on a voluntary basis only.

The following are some answers to general questions about the project and roles of the participants.

- What is my child's role? Your child will initially attend two training sessions and a focus group discussion. Training one is to learn about the power of youth voice to make change and an introduction to this project, training two is a photography training to learn about taking photograph for this project, and the focus group is a student-led discussion about outsider and insider perceptions of their school and community. Then he/she will be given a digital camera and be asked to take photographs of his/her self, family, school, and/or neighborhood that reflect strengths and assets. He/she will select photographs that he/she would like to share, and attend a series of weekly group discussions with other participants (4 sessions over four weeks' time) and also participate in an individual interview to talk about his/her photographs and why he/she chose to take specific pictures. Following the individual interviews, your child will attend a group reflection session to discuss the project and a final group analysis session in which your child will collaboratively work with other participants to determine themes that may emerge from their photographs.

The discussion, interview, and reflection/analysis sessions will adhere to the following schedule:

- Phase I:
  - Training Session #1: (9am – 12noon)
  - Participant Focus Group: (3:30pm – 5:30pm)
  - Training Session #2: (9am – 12noon)

- Phase II:
  - Weekly Discussion Session #1: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  - Weekly Discussion Session #2: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  - Weekly Discussion Session #3: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  - Weekly Discussion Session #4: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
- Phase III:
  - Individual interviews (2 hr session) \*Follow-up interviews may be scheduled as needed.
- Phase IV:
  - Group Reflection Session: (9am – 12noon)
- Phase V:
  - Group Analysis Session: (9am – 12noon)

As part of the project, observation data and/or audio recordings will be collected during each session.

- What is the purpose of the photographs? The photographs are taken as part of a project to identify strengths and assets of your community. The photographs will be used to educate others about the positive attributes your child perceives as assets about themselves, their school, and their community.
- How will my child’s photographs be used? Your child’s photographs will be used to prompt discussion about his/her community in the group sessions and/or interviews. Some photographs may be included in public exhibits, presentations, or publications. He/She need only share and photograph what he/she considers appropriate and comfortable. All of the photos that your child takes as a part of the photovoice project are his/hers. He/She has full ownership of the photos and has the right to decide which ones will be used for public display, presentation, and/or publication. With his/her permission, some of his/her photographs will be used for this project.
- How will my child’s name or identifying information be used? Your child’s name will be used during group discussions and the individual interview session; however, names and identifying information will not be revealed with photographs and narratives included in exhibits, presentations or publications unless you request the use of their first names or a pseudonym (a made-up name to protect their real identity). It is good to remember that despite efforts of confidentiality, there is always the chance that somebody may recognize them or a specific location in the photographs.
- How long will the project last? The project will last approximately eight weeks.
- What are the benefits and risks of participating in this project? Your child will receive a copy of their photographs and have the opportunity to work with their peers for social support. Your child will be able to tell their own stories related to their photographs, express their feelings and opinions, and ultimately promote community change. The main risk is the risk that someone will recognize your child in the photographs.
- Will my child be paid for participating in this project? Your child will not be paid for

participating in this project. However, if your child completes the project, he/she will be allowed to keep the digital camera loaned to him/her to use during this project. If he/she decides to stop participating in the project or if he/she misses two or more photovoice sessions, he/she will be removed from the project and required to return the camera to the project staff within one week of the second missed session. If the camera is not returned during this timeframe, he/she will be required to reimburse the project for the full cost of the camera (\$30).

- How will the information be stored? Information collected during the meetings and interviews will be stored on password-protected computers, and in files designated for this project. Access will be limited to the researchers. All data stored in computers will have password protection and all paper files will be secured in a locked storage file. Your and/or your child's personal information (full name, address, contact information, etc.) will never be shared with anyone outside the scope of this project. First names and/or photos of your child will only be used with your permission.
- What if my child (or I) change our minds and do not want to share photographs or participate in group discussion? If at a later date, children or their parents/guardians do not wish to share their photographs with others or participate in discussions, they may contact Amanda Hall – 804- [REDACTED] ([hallaf2@vcu.edu](mailto:hallaf2@vcu.edu)) OR Dr. Kurt Stemhagen 804- [REDACTED] ([krstemhagen@vcu.edu](mailto:krstemhagen@vcu.edu)). Photographs and all accompanying information will immediately be removed from the project data upon receipt of written request signed by legal parent/guardian. Children or their parents/guardians do not have to give any reason for withdrawing. Should your child wish to continue to participate but not have their photographs or stories included in the project, they may do so. There are no negative consequences for withdrawing from the project.
- Has this project been approved by an Institutional Review Board? This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Commonwealth University and the [REDACTED] County Public School Research Approval Process. These committees oversee research projects to ensure that the rights of participants are protected. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Virginia Commonwealth University Office of Research and Innovation at [erahelp@vcu.edu](mailto:erahelp@vcu.edu)
- Who is directing this project? The project directors are Amanda Hall and Dr. Kurt Stemhagen at Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education (with approval and support from [REDACTED] County Public Schools)
- What if I have additional questions about the project or my child's participation? If you have any additional questions about this project, feel free to contact Amanda Hall at [hallaf2@vcu.edu](mailto:hallaf2@vcu.edu) or Dr. Kurt Stemhagen at [krstemhagen@vcu.edu](mailto:krstemhagen@vcu.edu)
- How do I provide consent for my child's participation? If you are interested in your child participating in this project, please read the following agreement statement carefully, sign, date and return this form during the participant interest meeting. You will receive a copy of the form should you have any questions or concerns at a later date.

Please note: Virginia is a mandatory reporting state. While working with children, if we observe or become aware of child abuse or neglect we are obligated to report this to child protection authorities.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Agreement Statement:** By signing this consent form, I agree to my child’s participation in the study. I also understand and agree that, unless otherwise notified in writing, I am giving Virginia Commonwealth University and ██████ County Public Schools unlimited permission to copyright and use my child’s photograph(s), interview(s) and accompanying narrative(s) for public exhibits, presentations, publications and/or other educational purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_(initial) My child will return the digital camera to project staff if he/she misses two or more Photovoice sessions and/or decides to withdraw from the study prior to completion.

My child’s full participation in the “We Are…” Photovoice Project will include the following activities:

- Take part in a training and learn about taking photographs.
- Take pictures of things that are important to you in your life and community.
- Meet with other participants and/or researchers during all five phases of this project to discuss each other’s photographs. As part of the project, observation notes audio recordings will be taken during these sessions.
- Participate in an interview to explain your photographs to the researcher.

Remember, your child’s participation is completely voluntary. Signing this paper means that you have read this and that you want your child to be in the research project. This is your decision! It is OK if you don’t sign the paper or if you change your mind later.

All sessions will be held at ██████ Middle School, ██████ in Room █. Transportation will not be provided but if transportation is an issue, please contact Ms. Hall or Dr. Stemhagen (see contact info above).

Print Child’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Parent/Guardian’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian’s Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Contact Info:

Cell# \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

*Parent/Guardian signature is required if the participant is under 18 years of age.*

Thanks for your time and help!  
This project is a collaboration between  
Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education and  
██████ County Public Schools  
The project is directed by Amanda Hall and Dr. Kurt Stemhagen

## APPENDIX C

### Participant Training Session One

Example Agenda for Training Session #1 (9am – 12noon)

Facilitator: A. Hall

Time	Minutes	Task
9:00 – 9:30a	30	Welcome and Introductions Icebreaker
9:30 – 10:15a	45	Overview of Photovoice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is photovoice?</li> <li>• How has photovoice been used in other projects?</li> <li>• How are we going to use photovoice?</li> </ul>
10:15 – 10:20a	5	Break
10:20 – 10:50a	30	Review of project goals and participant roles and responsibilities: How is this project different from other critical service learning projects you have participated in? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the purpose of this project?</li> <li>• What is the role of a participant?</li> <li>• What are the participant responsibilities?</li> </ul>
10:50 – 11:20a	30	Establishing Group Norms Activity
11:20 – 11:40a	20	Overview of next session: Focus Group <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a focus group?</li> <li>• What will we discuss?</li> </ul>
11:40 – 12noon	20	Estimated Timeline & General Schedule Q & A: Post session reflection activity

### **Estimated Timeline & General Schedule**

- Phase I:
  - Training Session #1: (9am – 12noon)
  - Participant Focus Group: (3:30pm – 5:30pm)
  - Training Session #2: (9am – 12noon)
  
- Phase II:
  - Weekly Discussion Session #1: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  - Weekly Discussion Session #2: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  - Weekly Discussion Session #3: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  - Weekly Discussion Session #4: (3:30pm – 6:30pm)
  
- Phase III:
  - Individual interviews (2 hr session) \*Follow-up interviews may be scheduled as needed.
  
- Phase IV:
  - Group Reflection Session: (9am – 12noon)
  
- Phase V:
  - Group Analysis Session: (9am – 12noon)

## Developing a Contract for Group Norms Activity

### Expectations for Photovoice Sessions

Distribute one note card per participant.

Tell them the following directions. Allow approximately three minutes for them to write.

- Write these words on note card:
  - “hopes” on one side
  - “fears” on the other side
- On the side that has “hopes,” have participants write a response to the following question:
  - *What are your hopes for what would have to happen to make the Photovoice discussion sessions a terrific experience?*
- On the side that has “fears,” have participants write a response to the following question:
  - *What are your fears of what could happen that would make the Photovoice discussion sessions a terrible experience?*
- Do not write your name on note cards

Then, collect and redistribute cards to each person. Don’t worry if they get their own card.

Have them go around in the circle to read the “hopes” listed on card. (Write them on flipchart paper). Go around in the circle to read the “fears” listed on card. (Write them on flipchart paper)

Examples:

- What are your *hopes* for what would have to happen to make the photovoice sessions a terrific experience?
  - *e.g., people will openly share their thoughts about the photos*
- What are your *fears* of what could happen that would make the photovoice sessions a terrible experience?
  - *e.g., I will be misunderstood*

### Developing Ground Rules

- State that the Goals for Ground Rules are:
  - To build on the *terrifics*

– To avoid the *terribles*

Possible Ground Rules to discuss:

- Confidentiality – what is said here stays here
- Punctuality – please be on time
- Attendance – attend all meetings
  - Notify facilitators in advance if you are unable to attend
- Respect
- No disruptive side-bar chatting
- One person talking at a time
- Use respectful language
- Listen respectfully to other’s opinions
- Be respectful of differences in opinion
- Cell phones on silence! (Use only if it’s an emergency.)
- No texting
- The only stupid question is the one that isn’t asked.
- Disputes can be worked out.
- Talk directly to others, not about them when they aren’t present
- Others? (Write “other” ground rules on flipchart paper)

## APPENDIX D

### Youth Focus Group

Example Agenda for Focus Group Session (3:30 – 6:30pm)

Facilitator: A. Hall

Time	Minutes Allotted	Task
3:30 – 3:45p	15	Review of a focus group <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• rules and procedures</li><li>• purpose</li></ul>
3:45 – 4:15p	30	Discussion of Dominant Narrative <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Define “others”</li><li>• Review important terms related to project</li><li>• Deficits vs. Assets</li></ul>
4:15 – 4:35p	20	Complete “What Matters to Me” Worksheet
4:35 – 5:35p	60	Group discussion and construction of perceived dominant narrative - what “others” think about them, their school, and their community
5:35 – 5:45p	10	Overview of next session Q & A: Post session reflection activity
5:45 – 6:30p	45	Distribute Cameras with Camera Policy Form Camera 101 Basics

## What Matters to Me and What “Others” Think of Me Worksheet

Think about where you live and how you live for this activity.

What I am proud of and think is “good” about me, my school, and my community...

About Me as a person	•1. •2. •3.
About me as a student	•1. •2. •3.
About my school	•1. •2. •3.
About my community	•1. •2. •3.
About my ability to make a difference	•1. •2. •3.

What I think “others” think about me, my school, and my community....

About Me as a person	•1. •2. •3.
About me as a student	•1. •2. •3.
About my school	•1. •2. •3.
About my community	•1. •2. •3.
About my ability to make a difference	•1. •2. •3.

|

## Camera 101 Training

\*\* The facilitator will need to review this information with all participants when cameras are distributed to students.

What are the parts?

How to take a

picture?

How to use the various camera functions?

How to download pictures?

Where to securely store downloaded images?

How to recharge the battery?

How to keep it safe?

- keep away from food and beverages
- keep all doors/shutters closed when not in use
- use wristband
- keep in camera case when not using
- don't flaunt and become a target for someone to steal it from you

## Camera Policy Form for Photovoice Participants

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In the event that your camera is lost, broken, or stolen, you may still participate in the photovoice project if you can find/borrow/share a camera so that you can continue taking pictures and coming to our group sessions. You will not be given another camera.

If your camera is lost, broken, or stolen, OR you choose not to participate in the photovoice project any further, you will be required to pay \$30 for the cost of the camera to the VCU School of Education. This was agreed upon in the consent and assent forms you and your parent/guardian signed prior to your participation in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Your Name Here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Birth

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Your Name Here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness (Adult) Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

Thanks for your time and help!

This project is a collaboration between Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Education and [REDACTED] County Public Schools

The project is directed by Amanda Hall and Dr. Kurt Stemhagen

### Acknowledgement of Camera Received

Date	Name	Signature	Adult Witness
	1.		
	2.		
	3.		
	4.		
	5.		
	6.		
	7.		
	8.		

## APPENDIX E

### Participant Training Session Two

Example Agenda for Training Session #2 (9am – 12noon)

Facilitator(s): A. Hall

Time	Minutes Allotted	Task
9:00 – 9:15a	15	Group Icebreaker
9:15 – 9:30a	15	Overview of the use of photography in photovoice
9:30 – 10:15a	45	Photography: Power, Ethics and Legal Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethics and Safety Guidelines handout</li> <li>• Discussion of Photography Power, Ethics &amp; Legal Issues</li> <li>• Agreement to Ethics commitment form</li> <li>• Copies of photo release form</li> </ul>
10:15 – 10:20a	5	Break
10:20 – 11:35a	75	Photography 101 Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Photography 101 Handout</li> <li>• Seeing Like a Photographer</li> <li>• Practice using the camera with follow-up discussion of image</li> </ul>
11:35 – 11:50a	15	Assignment for next week: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think about what you would take photos of in your community that highlights the assets of your school and community</li> </ul>
11:50 – 12noon	10	Q & A: Post session reflection activity

## Ethics and Safety Guidelines Handout

- Voluntary Participation
  - In what way can I show respect for a person's decision to be photographed?
  - How do I get consent to take their picture?
- Do No Harm
  - What is my purpose for taking this photo?
  - Am I creating and using photos in a manner that will do no harm to persons appearing in the photos?
- Fairness/Justice
  - Am I using photos in a way that fairly represents the real situation, subject identity, or physical location of the image?
  - Am I respectful of the people, places, and things that I am

photographing? Image Ethics

According to Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) there are four distinct but important areas of privacy that must be taken into consideration when participants take photographs during their photovoice experience:

- Intrusion into One's Private Space
- Disclosure of Embarrassing Facts about Individuals
- Being Placed in False Light by Images
- Protection Against the Use of a Person's Likeness for Commercial Benefit

### Photographer Safety

~ Maintaining your personal safety is of highest priority.  
~ No photo is worth personal danger.

- Wear name badge
- Be aware of your surroundings
- Buddy system
- Don't do anything you wouldn't usually do
- Don't go anywhere you wouldn't usually go
- What if you are robbed or mugged?
  - Stay calm
  - Do not resist
  - If they are after your camera, give it up!

## Photography Power, Ethics & Legal Issues Activity

This worksheet can be used to generate individual reflection and group discussion when teaching about Photography Power, Ethics & Legal Issues.

**Scenario 1:** Frank is in his home, eating supper. He happens to look out his window, and sees someone on the sidewalk near his house. The person keeps looking up and down the street nervously. He seems to be looking at Frank's house. Finally, this person pulls out a camera, takes a picture of the house, and runs away.

- What seems to be happening here?
- What is going wrong?
- What could be done differently?

**Scenario 2:** Judy has to work an early morning shift. She didn't sleep well, and hasn't had her coffee yet. She is tired and cranky, having just dragged herself out of bed. She is standing at the bus shelter waiting for her bus. Someone across the street is watching her. This person all of a sudden pulls out a camera and takes her picture.

- What seems to be happening here?
- What is going wrong?
- What could be done differently?

## Fact Sheet and Photo Release Form

A Virginia Commonwealth University and  
[REDACTED] County Public Schools  
Photovoice Project

Project Title: "We Are..."  
Project Directors: Amanda Hall, Doctoral Candidate & Kurt Stemhagen,  
PhD  
Project Partner: Virginia Commonwealth University  
[REDACTED] County Public Schools

*\*Form to be completed anytime photographer takes a picture of a person's face.\**

### What am I being asked to do?

I am asking that you give me your permission to take your picture.

### Why are you taking these photographs?

I am taking pictures for the "We Are..." photovoice project. This photovoice project is being conducted to better understand strengths and assets in our community. To reach this goal, students like myself will be equipped with cameras and asked to go into their community and photograph people, places and things that represent the good things in their community. The photographs taken will be used for the purpose of triggering discussion amongst other youth participating in the project, and to illustrate important ideas. The pictures may also be used in publications and presentations about the project. The names of people who appear in the pictures will not be used or disclosed; however, someone who sees the publications or presentations may recognize the images of people in the pictures. At the conclusion of the project, the photos will belong to me as the photographer.

### Who are the people running this project? How can I contact them?

This project is being run by Virginia Commonwealth University with approval and support of [REDACTED] County Public Schools

\* The principal investigator is Amanda Hall. She can be reached at [hallaf2@vcu.edu](mailto:hallaf2@vcu.edu)  
804-[REDACTED]

\* The project chair is Dr. Kurt Stemhagen. He can be reached at  
[krstemhagen@vcu.edu](mailto:krstemhagen@vcu.edu) 804-[REDACTED]

### How will you use my picture?

After I have taken a certain number of pictures, I will bring them to a photo-discussion session. At this session, I will meet with participants and we will discuss our pictures. There is also the chance that some of the photographs will be included in public presentations about the "We Are..." photovoice project.

**Will people know that I had my picture taken for your project?**

To ensure “confidentiality”, your name or any identifying information will *never* be mentioned during the discussions we have about our photos. Also, your name will not be revealed if your picture was included in any presentations or displays. Still, there is always the chance that somebody may recognize you. All photographs and information will be maintained in a confidential manner. Data will be stored in computers that are password protected and all data will be secured in a locked storage file.

**What will I get out of having my picture taken for your project?**

You will have a chance to help the development of the “We Are...” photovoice project, a project that is aimed at improving the perception of our community through identifying strengths and assets and building on these strengths to improve our community.

**Do I have to allow you to take my picture? Can I withdraw my consent to use my picture if I wish?** You *do not* have to have your picture taken. Further, if you decide at a later date that you do not want your picture discussed or displayed anywhere, you may contact any of the research investigators whose names and email addresses are listed above and your picture(s) will be removed immediately from the collection. You do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing your consent. Remember, your willingness to be photographed is completely voluntary and you may decline at any time.

**What if I have any questions about the project or my participation?**

If you ever have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Amanda Hall at 804-██████████ [hallaf2@vcu.edu](mailto:hallaf2@vcu.edu) or Dr. Kurt Stemhagen at 804-██████████ [krstemhagen@vcu.edu](mailto:krstemhagen@vcu.edu)

\*\*\*\*\*

\*

If you are willing to give your consent to having your (and/or your child’s) picture taken, please fill out the following information, sign the bottom of the form, and return it to me. You may request a copy of the form for yourself, in case you have any questions or concerns at a later date.

*\*If photographee is under 18 years of age, then the parent or guardian must sign below.*

**Consent**

Having read the above information, I, \_\_\_\_\_(printed name), give permission to have my (and/or my child’s) photograph taken for purposes of this project. I give unlimited permission to copyright and use the photographs that may include me (and/or my child) in presentations about this project, as well as in publications. I have been told that I/my

child will not be identified by name or by other background/personal information. I waive any right that I (and/or my child) may have to inspect or approve the publication or use of the pictures.

If your photo is selected for a future photo exhibit, we would like to provide you with a copy. Would you like a copy of the photo sent to you?

Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

Would you like this sent to you by [ ] email or [ ] regular mail? (check one)

If you provide your address, we will send you an invitation to any future photo exhibition along with a copy of your photograph.

Please print your name and address (street number, street name, city, and zip code):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

“Photographee/Subject” Name

\_\_\_\_\_

“Photographee/Subject” Signature

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\*If Minors (under the age of 18):

Parent/Guardian of “Photographee/Subject” Name

\_\_\_\_\_

~ For Photographer Use~	
Photo Title:	_____
	_____
	_____
	_____
Uploaded:    yes, date:	_____
	_____

Parent/Guardian of “Photographee/Subject”

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_      Photographer’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks for your time and help!  
This project is a collaboration between Virginia Commonwealth University,  
School of Education and [REDACTED] County Public Schools  
The project is directed by Amanda Hall and Dr. Kurt Stenhagen

## Photovoice Ethics Agreement Form

Participant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In this photovoice project, you and other participants will take pictures and share stories about the strengths of your school and community. This is a chance to teach others about your life and your community.

By signing this ethics agreement form you also agree to follow the ethics of photovoice, which have been taught to you by the VCU Research Team for the "We Are..." Photovoice Project. Please read the following statements and sign your initials next to each statement to confirm that you have read and understand each ethic of Photovoice.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not intrude into an individual's personal space both publicly and privately.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not disclose embarrassing facts about individuals unless they have given me permission to do so.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not place individuals in false light with my photographs.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will respect the confidentiality of the stories that were discussed during the Photovoice discussion and reflection sessions.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will obtain the signature of all individuals represented in my photographs.
  
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not reveal the name(s) of any subject(s) in my photographs, and will not use them when discussing or writing about my photographs.

Signing this ethics agreement form means that you have read, understand and respect the ethics and privacy concerns involved in a photovoice project. If you fail to follow these principles you may be asked to leave the project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Your Name Here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Sign Your Name Here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Today's Date

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

This project is a collaboration between Virginia Commonwealth  
University, School of Education and  
██████████ County Public Schools  
The project is directed by Amanda Hall and Dr. Kurt Stemhagen

## Photography 101 Handout

Light ~Pay careful attention to the light conditions in your photograph

- When trying to avoid harsh shadows, shoot photographs of people in covered shade so the light is more even across your subject(s).
- Try to place the sun at your back when you are shooting your photographs. This will help you avoid backlit subjects with shadowy faces. \*unless you want shadowy faces for identity security

Shooting ~ When shooting a photograph, hold the camera steady and release the shutter carefully

- Hold the camera with both hands, with elbows against your body and feet spread apart. This helps to avoid camera shake or vibration which leads to un-sharp pictures.

Subject~ Have a strong center of interest in your photograph

- Get as close as you can with your camera to include only what is needed in the frame. Photographs often have extra things in the frame that distract from the center of care.

Framing~ Pay attention to the background in your photo

- Watch for clutter or for an object like a telephone pole that might appear to be growing out of the subject's head on the final picture.
- Are there elements in your photograph's background that are important for telling the story you want to tell?

Composition~ Composition is the placement of elements (people, objects, environment) in a photograph within the restriction of the frame of the photograph

- Pay attention to how you arrange the people, objects, and environment in your photograph

Tips:

- Experiment with different lighting. Remember that the flash will not reach very far at night. Be sure to limit night shots to objects that are within arm's length. You may need to use the flash even on a sunny day outdoors.
- Keep the sun behind the photographer when outdoors.
- Keep your finger away from the lens and flash.

## Seeing Like a Photographer Activity

*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes. – Marcel Proust*

*For me the camera is a sketch book, an instrument of intuition and spontaneity. In order to give meaning to the world, one has to feel oneself involved in what one frames through the viewfinder. This attitude requires concentration, a discipline of mind, sensitivity, and a sense of geometry. – Henri Cartier-Bresson*

A few tips to get you started...

- Be mindful of the surroundings
- Don't rush your shots
- Don't be afraid to play with your camera
- Look beyond the obvious

### 9 Guidelines of Photographic Composition

1. Keep it simple
2. Rule of Thirds
3. Subject in Focus
4. Control the background
5. Use the power of lines/repetition of form
6. Stand on your head
7. Horizontal vs. vertical orientation
8. Pay attention to light and shadow
9. Be imaginative and have fun

\*Developed by Kathleen Robbins, MFA.

## Photography Practice Worksheet

You will have 20 minutes to practice taking photos. This activity will allow you to practice using your camera in the different modes. After you take each picture write a short description of the picture and why you took the photo. This will help your memory later when we discuss the pictures.

\*\*You must have two photographs of people, thus, you will need to use the photo release form.\*\*

Mode	Description of the Photo	Why I took this Photo	Photo Release

## Photo Elicitation Worksheet

\*Photo elicitation activity for practice in “seeing like a photographer”

Your Name:

Title of  
Photo:

Date Taken:

Description of Photo:

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S	What do you <u>S</u> ee happening here? (Describe what the eye sees)
H	What is actually <u>H</u> appening here? (What is the unseen story behind the picture? What does the heart see? What does this photo make you “feel”?)
O	What does this photo tell us about life in your school or <u>c</u> ommunity?
W	<u>W</u> hy are things this way? (Why does this strength exist?)

If person(s) in photo:

Photo Release Form Obtained? YES\_\_\_

Name(s) of person(s):

## Review from Training Sessions Activity Worksheet

\*\* You may work with a partner and look at your notes.

Purpose: List the main purpose of this photovoice project

### Ground Rules

List 3 ground rules for our group sessions

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

### Ethics

List the three ethical guidelines when taking photos of others

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

### Photographer Safety

List three ways to stay safe as a photographer

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

### Photography 101

List three of the 9 guidelines to seeing like a photographer

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

## APPENDIX F

### Photo Documentation

Example Agenda for Sessions # 4-7 (3:30 – 6:30pm)

Facilitator: A. Hall

Time	Minutes Allotted	Task
3:30-4:00p	30	Discussion of week's theme and any student points of interest about the past week's photo experience
4:00 – 4:30p	30	Upload photos and select ones for sharing
4:30 – 5:30p	60	Students pair up into small groups <input type="checkbox"/> Discussion about selected photos ~ “SHO” <input type="checkbox"/> Do as many photos as possible in time allotted
5:30 – 6:15p	45	Regroup~ Discuss any similarities or differences between selected photos (possible themes)
6:15 – 6:30p	30	<input type="checkbox"/> Review of next week's theme and Q & A

#### NOTES:

- For first few times participants upload photos from their digital camera to the computer and then your master flash drive, add extra time to the agenda for uploading. If possible, have extra assistants to help one-on-one with this training process.
- Session 7 Note: Discuss how the participants would like to celebrate at the end of the project, perhaps with a pot-luck lunch.



## APPENDIX G

### Photo Elicitation Interviews

#### Individual Interview Guide

Students will select 8-10 images to tell “their” story (2 – 3 images from each weekly “theme”). During the individual interview, the researcher will use the SHOWeD model (outlined below) as a form of photo elicitation for each photograph, allowing students to construct a narrative from their own selected images.

S	What do you <u>S</u> ee happening here? (Describe what the eye sees – the visual only)
H	What is actually <u>H</u> appening here? (What is the unseen story behind the picture? What does the heart see? What does this photo make you “feel”? – the visual plus context)
O	What does this photo tell us about y <u>O</u> ur life in your school /and or c <u>o</u> munity?
W	<u>W</u> hy are things this way? (Why does this strength exist? )
e	How could this photo <u>E</u> ducate people about you, your school, or community? How does this photo provide opportunities for you to highlight the assets in your school or community?
D	What can you <u>D</u> o about it? (How does this photo provide opportunities for you to improve what “others” think about you, your school, or community through action?)

## APPENDIX H

### Participant Group Reflection Session

#### Reflection Documentation Worksheet

**Part I.** Now that we have discussed your photos during the individual interview, take a few minutes to select your chosen photos. Decide if you would like to make a “catchy title” for your photos, and write 3 to 5 sentence description that you think best describes each photo. Once you have completed your descriptions, write your story! You will share your narrative with the group and we will discuss any similarities and/or differences between each participant’s constructed narrative.

**EXAMPLE:**

Your Name:

**PHOTO 1:**

Title of Photo

Description of Photo:

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**Part II.** We will discuss as a group how the photovoice project may have been different from other critical service learning projects you’ve worked on. What was different? What was the same? How has this project impacted you and your views of yourself and your community? Did the process of taking and interpreting your photos help you tell “your story”? If so, how?

## APPENDIX I

### Participant Group Analysis Session

#### Theme Activity Worksheet

1. Think about your selected photos as well as the selected photos of others (upload them to view during the activity).
2. On a note card – do this quickly. We want the first thoughts that come to mind. (no more than 5 minutes for each category below)
  - a. GREEN PAPER: Record 3-5 words or phrases that capture the main strengths about you as a person and as a student – things about yourself that you are proud of.
  - b. YELLOW PAPER: Record 3-5 words or phrases that capture the main strengths about your school – things about your school that are good.
  - c. BLUE PAPER: Record 3-5 words or phrases that capture the main strengths about your community – things about your community that are good.
  - d. PINK PAPER: Record 3-5 words or phrases that capture the main things about you, your school, and your community that allow you to be empowered and/or to be a change agent.
3. In groups of 2-3, sort your words into common categories by paper color.
  - a. After they are sorted, record a title for each group of words.
  - b. Recorder will capture all words and title for each group.
4. Present main themes we gathered from discussions so far (initial themes from

sessions 4-7 plus reflection session)

5. How do your themes overlap?
  - a. What were the similar themes? Were there any new or different themes?
  - b. Do any of these need to be revised?

Group Members:

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Recorder:

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<b>GREEN:</b>  Words:       Title:	<b>YELLOW:</b>  Words:       Title:
<b>BLUE:</b>  Words:       Title:	<b>PINK:</b>  Words:       Title:

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<sup>i</sup> All appendices material adapted for use with this project from, Powers, M.C., Freedman, D.A., & Pitner, R. (2012). *Final snapshot to civic action: A photovoice facilitator's manual*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina School of Social Work.