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THE NATIONS CHILDREN

Teaching Self-Advocacy: An exploration of three female foster youth's perceptions
regarding their preparation to act as self-advocates

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

University of Redlands

in conjunction with the

Faculty of Graduate Studies in Educational Leadership

In Fulfillment

Of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education, Educational Leadership for Educational Justice

by

Jason C. Jones

January 2010

Abstract of Dissertation

THE NATIONS CHILDREN—Teaching Self-Advocacy: An exploration of foster youth's perceptions regarding their preparation to act as self-advocates

Jason C. Jones

School of Education, University of Redlands

January 2010

Emancipated foster youth must have real world opportunities to learn to become participating citizens through self-advocacy to create educational justice. Emancipation for foster youth occurs between the ages of 18-22 and it is a state's responsibility to provide continuous support through direct instruction in self-advocacy. The aim of states and social service agencies should be to change our present practice of support for emancipated foster youth and infuse direct instruction of self-advocacy skills teaching youth, in school settings, to advocate their needs and prepare them for transition to adulthood. The Nations Children explores self-advocacy as an educational justice issue for emancipated foster youth allowing youth to rise beyond marginalization and begin to direct their own lives. This research uses case study methodology to focus on three emancipated foster youth and their perceptions regarding their preparation to act as self-advocates. The study demonstrates how successful emancipation and transition to adulthood are closely tied to self-advocacy as foster youth learn processes of inquiry through reflection and dialogue. Similarly, the study demonstrates the need to teach self-advocacy in schools as a means to shift power from the system to the individual, allowing foster youth to choose how they live and are supported in ways that facilitate their preferences.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One of the challenges of transitioning between adolescence and young adulthood is developing the ability to become a self-advocate so that people can pursue their purpose(s) in life, meet their own needs and interact effectively with other people, and contribute to the welfare of society. Our adolescents come from diverse life circumstances, some from entitled and advantaged positions and others from circumstances where they have needed to enter being a foster youth. When a foster youth turns 18 they are often left on their own with little to no support from their government parent to address the changing need(s) of their protection and safety, as they enter adulthood in terms of education opportunities to learn self-advocacy (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). The foster care system often presents a number of paradoxes regarding the care of children, for example, foster care plays a vital role in saving some children from death and serious harm while, it leads to many other children suffering, particularly youth leaving the system as adults (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). These youth have constituted a growing at-risk population because their education and social needs may not be addressed appropriately while they are in care and transition from foster care (Unterreiner, 2008). The nation has taken responsibility for the protection of youth in foster care; such responsibility also has necessitated the need to help these youth develop self-advocacy.

Why 18 is considered adulthood? The answer to this question is that at the age of 18 a young person is supposed to be more responsible for themselves with an increased ability to handle independence. Historically, this came about in 1971 after the passage of the 26th Amendment. Although this amendment granted the right to vote, it also identified

the age at which a male can be drafted. (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007). Because this age was set as a transition into young adulthood, the mere implementation of this legislation has not meant that youth from life circumstances involving foster care are prepared for the transition. This decision that came about, not because youth were viewed as mature and prepared for independence, but because it provided a means for filling ranks with young draftees to fight the Vietnam War (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007). If this lack of the development of self-advocacy has not yet occurred for them when they next reach the transition age of 21 and being granted the right to consume alcohol, this could exacerbate frustration in the lives of these youth as they may engage in abusing alcohol. However, when foster youth turned 18, they faced an end to services.

Similar to past decisions, the decision to terminate foster care services when a student turned 18 had not been a decision in the interest of foster youth's self-sufficiency, but a fiscal decision based on the belief that federal funding sources should end at 18 (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007). When funding has ceased for foster youth who have become 18, these youth may be left with unmet needs. This is because people at this stage of the life span have not yet achieved maturity but face negotiating growing up (i.e., experimenting in being an adult or practicing being an adult as opposed to appropriately handling responsibilities that have been associated with adulthood such as independence). As a result, these youth need support from parent systems to guide them through their journey to independence (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005, p. 10). Osgood (2005) noted that, if the transition to adulthood requires considerable family assistance for youth in the general population, then it is likely to be especially challenging for vulnerable populations who have required additional assistance at earlier ages. Bullard, a

former foster youth, (1996) echoed Osgood's sentiment when he stated: "Don't ever let yourself be lulled into a false sense of security...Always remember that just because you are getting money from foster care now, it does not mean you'll be getting it forever. Always have a plan of your own and do what is necessary to help yourself. Let the system help you, but don't let it live for you (p. 103)." As Osgood (2005) and Bullard (1996) suggested, while government sponsored foster youth programs exist to parent, support, and protect children, these forms of support must have as their goal helping youth work toward independence through self-advocacy

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

According to such democratic ideals as self-determination and the pursuit of happiness, there are foster youth who face emancipation without having been taught how to become self-advocates and been nurtured to possess the self-efficacy necessary for the responsibilities of adulthood. This is a national problem, especially when viewed through the statistics of the number of youth involved. In 2001, 290,000 children entered the foster care system. This has made them the "nation's children," as they have been taken from their homes to be parented by government social service agencies (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008; Farruggia, Greenberger, Chen, Hechhausen, 2006; Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008). Therefore, the statement of the problem of my research is to explore foster youth's perceptions regarding their preparation to act as self-advocates. Thus, there is a need for this study so that through the voices of the youth studied may inform foster care providers, teachers and administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders about the needs of these youth during one of the most important transitions in the human life span: from adolescence to young adulthood.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my phenomenological study is to examine and analyze the perceptions of emancipated former foster youth in terms of how the foster care system prepared and/or failed to prepare them to act as self-advocates. Attaining this purpose meant developing possible insights that may help other youth facing the transition into emancipation. The three people who participated in my study consisted of youth who were 18 years of age and all were females. There was an additional participant, a male, but he later chose not to participate. Each person was interviewed regarding her perceptions of self-advocacy development in one's own life. Over the course of four months, participants were interviewed three times.

A phenomenological approach was appropriate for my study because I wanted to understand a phenomenon that already had occurred in the lives of the participants. This meant that I needed to interview them, transcribe their interviews verbatim, analyze the data for themes or categories of meaning, and then write thick descriptions of their experiences. I sought to increase the credibility of my study to achieve my stated purpose through the use of member checking to ensure the knowledge I was constructing was accurate according to their experiences.

OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTION

I chose an overarching research question to guide the development of the interview purpose. The overarching question was: How were emancipated foster youth prepared during their time in foster care to serve as self-advocates as they transitioned to adulthood? From this question, semi-structured interview questions were developed.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS UNDERLYING THE OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTION

There were six semi-structured interview questions prepared for the participants. These questions were drawn from Yin (1984). Yin stressed the use of such questions had been to elicit the stories of participants. The perceptions and interpretations of their experience are vital to this process and the purpose of this study. These questions were as follows:

1. What are the descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
2. What opinions, intentions, goals, desires, and values are described related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
3. What feelings or emotions possibly are expressed in the sharing of the participants' experiences of being former foster youth and their preparation for self-advocacy?
4. What is the understanding of the participants related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
5. How do the participants describe their experiences in sensory terms (i.e., what they said, felt, heard, smelled, touched) regarding the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
6. What background or demographic information is shared during the interview?

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Using the overarching research question and the six types of questions posited by Yin (1984), I developed the following semi-structured questions that were used in the first interview:

1. What were your experiences of being prepared to take responsibility for your own life once you were emancipated from foster care?
2. What are the responsibilities you encountered and continue to handle as a result of emancipation?
3. What changes and/or adaptations occurred in your life as you transitioned from foster care to emancipation?
4. What do you think about your time in foster care in terms of learning or not learning what you would need to be able to do once you were emancipated?
5. What are your thoughts regarding your ability to pursue and attain your goals?
6. What are your thoughts regarding how foster care can prepare youth to live confidently and competently after emancipation?
7. When you were to be emancipated what were your feelings?
8. What have you been doing since your emancipation in terms of handling responsibilities and getting needs met?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of my study is that the existing research in the literature is limited regarding self-advocacy of people emancipated from foster care. My study, although not intended to be generalized, may provide foster care providers, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders with an understanding of three people's experiences of being emancipated and their preparedness for self-advocacy.

The power and significance of my study came through the voices of foster youth who shared their experiences about how placement prepared them or failed to prepare them for emancipation to act as self-advocates. Through their voices the needs and values

of these youth emerged. This exploration only serves to add information to a growing body of knowledge and to support program development and curricular development for self-advocacy programs. Because successful emancipation is connected to self-advocacy, needed in adulthood, my study yielded insights regarding the transition from foster care into emancipation.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The researcher is the tool constituting a qualitative researcher. This means that I needed to recruit and work with participants who met the criteria of my research. This resulted in three participants who lived together and participated in a program for emancipated youth. The age of all three participants was 18 and all were female.

RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND

I became interested in foster care based on my own experiences related to it. I did not know much about foster youth until I met my wife. She came from a family who were foster care providers. Her family took in two brothers who lived with them as toddlers and one of the brothers still lives with them. Thus, my wife came to view these brothers as her brothers. I met these brothers when they first joined the family and over the years have developed a positive relationship with them. Based on my wife's experiences of being in a family that provided foster care, as well as, my own experiences with her family and her foster brothers, my wife and I decided to become foster parents.

Two years ago a newborn child was placed into our foster care. From the beginning of this placement through the finalization of the adoption, the social service agency and my wife and I were in agreement that my wife and I wanted to adopt this child. During the period of time that we dealt with the county foster care department, our

experiences with all personnel were positive. This experience, as well as, my observations of my wife's foster brothers, led me to see the positive possibilities that exist for some foster youth when placed in caring and loving contexts.

My experiences as a middle and high school counselor involved working with many foster youth. This enabled me to observe and interact with them as they transitioned from middle school into high school and from high school into early adulthood. My experiences led me to the realization that they were not being prepared to successfully negotiate these transitions. For example, being proactive in getting such needs met as arranging to meet with a counselor, talking with a teacher regarding a grade, possessing skills in preparing for and pursuing job interviews, and other responsibilities that involve being a self-advocate seemed to be beyond their current level of competence and confidence. I recognized the need for these students to be helped in developing the competence and confidence to become proactive regarding the responsibilities that accompany life.

Given these experiences, I felt that I needed to deepen my understanding of foster care youth. I specifically wanted to listen to and understand the voices of foster youth. This included discerning if my perception that they needed explicit and specific support in developing self-advocacy actually was accurate or if their lived experience differed from my perception.

When conducting my study I had to monitor my own assumptions regarding foster care. This included the positive experiences I had with my wife, her family, and our adopted son regarding the foster care system. I needed to keep this in mind so that I did not unconsciously assume that all foster youth had positive experiences within the

system. I also needed to monitor my perception that middle and high school foster youth were not being prepared to transition between these schools and transition into emancipation as well.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms used in my study are as follows, and have been sorted alphabetically to allow ease of use:

- “Dignity of risk:” an individual’s right to their fair share of risk experiences in life that all individuals face from time to time (Perske, 1972; Nirje, 1972).
- “Theoretical saturation” working to exhaust “the dimensions of the categories (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 69).
- Autonomous judgments: This is a process that promotes and supports educational justice as foster youth begin to speak out for their own needs and participate in processes of inquiry (Kennedy & Killius, 1986; Friere, 1993).
- Constant comparative method: comparing the similarities and differences of the major categories of incidents and perceptions (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
- Data: This refers to the information about the phenomenon or phenomena that is or was experienced by a group of people. In a phenomenological research study, data are gathered primarily through the use of interviews with participants who have experienced the phenomenon or phenomena. Analyses of documents also may be conducted if appropriate.
- Educational Justice: Educational justice is operationalized as a subset of social justice that focuses on marginalized groups—those groups that have been most often underserved and underrepresented and who face various forms of

oppression in both schools and society (Dantley and Tillman, 2006), to learn self-advocacy through processes of inquiry (Freire, 1993). Shapiro (2006) defined educational justice as "...work that engages the heart, mind, and body in ways that are exhilarating, yet highly stressful and physically exhausting" (p. 233). Educational justice advocates creating inclusive learning environments where students feel physically and psychologically safe because sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, sizeism, and ageism are intentionally addressed by the educator if and when they arise.

- **Emancipated/ Aged-out:** The terms "emancipated" and "aged out" have been used to describe foster youth that have been discharged from the foster system once they have attained a certain age; in a majority of cases this is 18-21 with over 4,000 foster youth emancipating themselves a year (Delgado et. al., 2007).
- **Foster Care/ Foster Youth:** (different placement types) The term foster care most commonly has referred to all out of home placements for children who have not been able to remain with their birth parents (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008). These out of home placements have taken several forms: going to live in a placement with another family member, friend, group home, or foster family. Out of home placements have usually been related to some type of abuse or neglect (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008). Youth being placed in foster care constitute the designation of being foster youth.
- **INSPIRE Program:** INSPIRE has been designed to provide support for emancipated foster youth by providing opportunities for apartments, college

classes, part-time jobs, and free counseling through a partnership with a local religious affiliated private University.

- **Phenomenological Study:** A study that describes the meaning of lived experience where the researcher puts aside all prejudgments and collects data on how individuals make sense out of a particular experience or situation. The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a description of its essence in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflective reliving and reflective appropriation of something meaningful (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001; Van Manen, 1990).
- **Qualitative Research:** Research in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection (observation, field notes, interviews, etc.) who gathers words or picture, and analyses them (Yin, 1984; Lauer, 2006)
- **Resiliency:** Resiliency has acknowledged ones ability to 'bounce back' or successfully survive overwhelming odds. It describes individuals who face inconceivable situations/ circumstances and overwhelming odds (Improving Economic Opportunities for Young People Served by the Foster Care System, 1997; Werner, 1990).
- **Self-Advocacy:** self-advocacy is where foster youth have found a purpose in life related to their future and have tried to align their decisions in a manner consistent with their values and purposes. Negotiating how to work effectively with foster youth so as not to create a sense of dependency by providing physical support (e.g., housing, clothing, etc.) (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006; Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 1996).

- Self-Determination (SDT): Primarily focused on youth with disabilities in school settings providing transitional services based on student's needs and interests (Field & Hoffman, 1994; IDEA P.L. 101-476; Bremer, Kachgal, Schoeller, 2003; Ward, 2005; Wehymeyer, 2002), SDT is the belief that all individuals have the ability to direct their own lives, assess values and set goals (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003; Kennedy & Killius, 1986).
- Social Justice: recognition of (1) marginalization, and (2) technical problems, with workable solutions, and adaptive problems, where there must be a shift in individual and societal values (Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Heifetz, 1994).
- The Nation's Children: Children taken from their homes to be parented by government social service agencies (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008; Farruggia, Greenberger, Chen, Hechausen, 2006; Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008).
- Theoretical relevance: comparing the categories to the existing literature.
- Transcriptions: Written translation of tape recorded interview or field notes (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003)
- Violence: Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence (Friere, 1993).
- Web of credibility: This concept embodies the goal of accuracy in understanding and reporting the perspectives of my research participants.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1

In this chapter I began with an introduction that revealed the increasing number of youth who have entered into the foster care system. Included in the introduction was the challenge faced by foster youth in transition from adolescence and actual foster care to emancipation. This included self-advocacy. One of the challenges of transitioning between adolescence and young adulthood is developing the ability to become a self-advocate, this was presented in my problem statement and purpose for conducting the study. This chapter also addressed the age of emancipation and why 18 is considered adulthood, research questions with types of questions and semi-structured questions, the significance of the study, scope of the study, background of the researcher, limitations, and definitions of terms. With all of this I will explore foster youth's perceptions regarding their preparation to act as self-advocates. The goal of this exploration is to hear their voices regarding their preparation to act as self-advocates and gain deeper understandings of their needs as they transition from emancipation to adulthood.

Chapter 2 addresses the theoretical lens used in conducting my research. Chapter 3 provides a review of the related theoretic literature. It is comprehensive and related to the topic. Literature findings were presented on the topic foster care emancipation and its connection to self-advocacy from a broad historical view. In like manner, specific literature related to emancipated foster youth and the need for self-advocacy education is presented.

Chapter 4 presents the methodology of the study. It describes qualitative research and the use of a phenomenological research study as the research approach. A description

of the study, participants, and setting has been provided, along with data collection procedures. Ethical considerations are addressed along with data analysis procedures.

Chapter 5 is the declaration of findings. In this chapter the findings are presented in a manner appropriate to this study. As such the findings are presented in a narrative form sharing stories and insights of participants. Throughout the findings arguments are formed and grounded in the study. Theoretical arguments are formed from the data and presented in a coherent and informative manner.

Lastly, Chapter 6 provides the conclusions for the study. In this chapter the conclusions drawn from the study are presented and the findings related to the broader theoretical issues. The process used is also critiqued and implications, which could affect other similar studies presented.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETIC FRAMEWORK

A theoretical orientation is important in conducting qualitative research. It influences everything related to the methodological approach for conducting a study. I wanted to choose a theoretical orientation that would be consistent with social justice. The following definition of social justice reveals the reason I chose a phenomenological theoretical orientation:

An interest in social justice means attentiveness to ideas and actions concerning fairness, equity, equality, democratic process, status, hierarchy, and individual and collective rights and obligations. It signifies thinking about being human and about creating good societies and a better world. It prompts reassessment of our roles as national and world citizens. It means exploring tensions between complicity and consciousness, choice and constraint, indifference and compassion, inclusion and exclusion, poverty and privilege, and barriers and opportunities. It also means taking a critical stance toward actions, organizations, and social institutions. Social justice studies require looking at both realities and ideas (Charmaz, 2005, p. 507).

In order to delve into my social justice issue regarding self-advocacy for emancipated foster youth I must explain critical pedagogy as articulated by Paulo Friere. Accordingly the Critical Pedagogy, as articulated by Friere (1993), liberation from oppression or marginalization occurs through critical analysis of institutions. In order for this to happen people need to develop what he called Conscientization. The term means developing critical consciousness so as to break the culture of silence that often typifies marginalized groups. Conscientization "...represents the development of the awakening

of critical awareness “ (Freire, 2007, p. 39). It is a way of learning that focuses on uncovering social and political actions that work against people attaining the freedom necessary to pursue their dreams. This term is critical to my study because the work of emancipated foster youth in developing self-advocacy is a form of liberation so that they can pursue the democratic ideals of their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

The phenomenological theoretical orientation is necessary for my study because it is a method of inquiry. The German philosopher Edmund Husserl developed phenomenology. The reason this orientation is important to me is the emphasis on consciousness and experiences regarding a social world (Scott & Marshall, 2005). Such inquiry attempts “...to understand the meaning of events and interaction to ordinary people in particular situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). According to this theoretical orientation, the methodological choice in selecting participants occurs through purposeful sampling. “The participants in the study need to be carefully chosen to be individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question so that the researcher in the end can forge a common understanding” (Creswell, 2007, p. 62).

This theoretical orientation serves as a lens for exploring the dependency many foster youth experience because they have not been educated to self-advocate (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005). Their oppression is in not being provided education opportunities to learn self-advocacy. As Freire (1993) noted that one of the reasons students do not learn how to think autonomously is that they are immersed in what he called *banking education*. This means that the dominant model of education is the transmission or “making deposits” of information into the minds of students as passive

recipients. Foster youth need what Freire called *problem-posing education* so that they could learn to think. This latter approach to education emphasizes the need for teacher and student to engage in dialogue about critical issues. This model is in opposition to the *banking model* as illustrated by the following assumptions of the *banking model*:

1. The teacher teaches and the students are taught;
2. The teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
3. The teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
4. The teacher talks and the students listen—meekly;
5. The teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
6. The teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
7. The teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
8. The teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
9. The teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
10. The teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (Freire, 1993, p. 73).

These conditions mirror societal oppression because youth are not encouraged to develop their voice, to engage in inquiry, and become fully alive (Freire, 1993). In terms of banking education youth are only permitted to practice skills learned. They are not permitted education opportunities to participate in acts of asking. For foster youth by not

participating in processes of inquiry they are manageable beings who fail to develop “critical consciousness” allowing them to be transformers of the world. The banking model of education perpetuates the status quo whereby youth do not have opportunities to participate in processes of inquiry, thus being prevented from developing critical consciousness. Thus, they are socialized into accepting the passive role imposed on them and adapting to the world as it is and the fragmented view of reality there in.

An assumption of the banking model of education is that when oppressed people do not display what those in authority consider to be effort, they are judged to be “incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the generous gestures of the dominant class” (Freire, 1993, p. 59). In terms of foster youth it would recognize that they too do not have more and remain in their oppressive state as a result of their effort, not the generosity of the dominant class or for foster youth the generosity of government agencies. When students representing an oppressed group are labeled as being lazy or other negative connotations by the dominant power structures, these students can be ignored and prevented from sharing their life experiences. It allows for the dominant group to maintain their position hierarchy and positions of power over subordinate groups, who have no input through dialogue. In this manner banking education resists dialogue (Freire, 1993).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

In this chapter I have defined my theoretical orientation that guides my study. To reveal its relevance and necessity to my study, I discussed it within the social justice context of Freire’s descriptions of conscientization, banking model of education, and the problem-posing model of education. This was done because the dominant model of

education in the United States remains the banking model where students are more often taught what to think rather than how to think. Through the phenomenological theoretical lens, I will be able to examine and describe the perceptions of emancipated foster youth in terms of their experiences related to learning how to become self-advocates.

CHAPTER 3: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The term foster care most commonly has referred to all out of home placements for children who have not been able to remain with their birth parents (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008). These out of home placements have taken several forms: going to live in a placement with another family member, friend, group home, or foster family. Out of home placements have usually been related to some type of abuse or neglect (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008). This process has consisted of state officials substantiating mis/maltreatment. From this determination caseworkers and courts have then had to determine whether the child can safely remain home, with in home services to support the family, or if they must be placed in state care. When placement has occurred the state must develop a “permanency plan” and make “reasonable efforts” to reunify children with their birth parents. Research has shown that more than half (57%) of children who enter state care exit through reunification with their birth parents (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). Therefore, as states have taken legal custody of youth they often also have taken responsibility for meeting their needs, protecting their rights, helping them achieve their goals and assisting youth in acquiring the skills necessary to become fully participating citizens (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001; Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 120; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005, p. 7).

As was stated earlier, when children and youth enter foster care government has the responsibility for acting as parent or caregiver to them (Children, Families, and Foster Care, Vol. 14, No. 1). As such, a foundational principle has needed to be “do no harm”

(Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008). This has meant moving children from their familial home when necessary because of abuse or neglect. Such removal has not been without risk, especially when youth have attained emancipation without successfully transitioning to adulthood and being able to self-advocate to meet needs (The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, and Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc., 2008).

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOSTER CARE

Caring for children has evolved over the course of history. From the beginnings of recorded history, the social context of caring for children has included those youth who have experienced some form of mis/mal treatment in terms of physical abuse, sexual abuse and/or neglect (Dumbrill, 2003; Corby, 2000; Dumbrill & Trocme, 1999; Pollock, 1983). For example, as early as the 1700's orphans and children whose parents were unable to care for them were often sent as indentured workers to live with other families (O'Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006; Osgood et. al, 2005; McDonald et. al, 1996). It had been in 1874 when a member of the New York Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals found a six-year-old child named Mary Ellen being beaten by her caregivers. This child was rescued and the New York Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals asserted that, "children deserved at least the same rights as animals" (Dumbrill, 2003; Costin et. al., 1996; Lazowitz & Shelman, 1996; Litzelfelner & Petr, 1997; Mohr et. al., 1999). Prior to this point animals had more rights to protection and safety than children. It had been during the 1800's that private religious groups and charitable organizations began to establish some of the first orphanages (O'Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008). As time progressed, so did the protection and care of children.

As child protection in the United States grew it moved from practical concerns—meeting the physical needs of youth—to an awareness and concern about the impacts of abuse and the damage it caused (O’Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008). In 1935 the Social Security Act had been established, which provided federal grants for states to establish child welfare agencies and develop local programs to provide child welfare services (O’Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008). In 1962 a medical team discovered “battered child syndrome” as a result of abuse (Dumbrill, 2003). This medical discovery brought greater attention to issues of child abuse. Progress continued well into the 1970’s with a larger focus on matters of sexual abuse (Dumbrill, 2003; Committee on Sexual Offenses Against Children and Youth, 1984; Finkelhor, 1984; Kempe & Kempe, 1978; Russell, 1983).

In 1974, Congress established *The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)*, which provided federal funding targeted for the development of child abuse reporting procedures and investigation systems (O’Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008). As the children in care began to increase, so did the duration of their stay increase. A result of this increase had been the establishment of *Public Law 96-272 The Adoption Assistance and child Welfare Act of 1980* (O’Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008). This act specified the following:

- Established the first federal procedural rules governing child welfare case management, permanency planning, and foster care placement reviews;
- Required states to develop a state plan detailing how child welfare services will be delivered;

- Required states to make “reasonable efforts” to keep families together, by providing both prevention and family reunification services;
- Created an adoption assistance program (Title IV-E Adoption Assistance); and
- Created the first significant role for the court system, by requiring courts to review child welfare cases on a regular basis.

In 1986 concern was expressed for foster youth who transitioned from out of home placements. The specific concern was whether they were prepared to transition to adulthood after leaving state care (O’Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008). As a result congress enacted the Independent Living Program¹, which provided funding for states to help older foster youth make the transition from foster care to independence, through education (O’Neill-Murray & Gesiriech, 2008; Courtney & Hughes-Heuring, 2005).

Although the care of youth has been a concern throughout history, there also has existed the need to analyze the current system of foster care through the theoretical lens of phenomenology. The reason analysis has been needed arose from the recognition that the very system designed to protect youth from harm may have failed. This failure has involved not addressing the needs of foster youth as when they have engaged in transitioning from a placement where their needs were supposed to have been met to the independence of adulthood. Specifically, these youth have needed to be educated in such areas as self-advocacy, a plan for their future, and development of skills. Unless youth have learned these skills they have tended to depend on government for continued assistance. This has neither served these youth nor society itself (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006).

¹ Independent Living Programs are formalized instruction, including supervised performance in job search, career counseling, apartment finding, budgeting, shopping, cooking, and house cleaning (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001).

Such failure has resulted in perpetuation of a system that has created dependency on the part of foster youth, as they have been unable to transition into adulthood. The result has been the continuation of oppression and marginalization as related to their education opportunities to learn self-advocacy.

EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE A SOCIAL JUSTICE CONSTRUCT

Foster youth have been cared for by a government system, which has had as its mission to advocate for their need(s). In doing so these agencies often have developed their programs with little input from the youth served by them. Thus, youth have been prevented from questioning, conducting reflective investigation, and engaging in critical decision-making (Bulgren, 1998). Such prevention has served to rob these youth from the critical decision-making process of transitioning into adulthood that has been necessary during this phase of the life span (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006; Bulgren, 1998; Hoffman, 2000). Foster youth who have been denied a voice in preparing for their future and have not been assisted in navigating the transition into adulthood have faced a form of violence as noted by Friere (1993). When these youth have been denied these educational opportunities, they have faced educational injustice because the result has been dependence on government for meeting adult needs.

Understanding the concept of educational justice and its relationship to issues of social justice allowed for increased awareness about the need to educate foster youth in becoming self-advocates. In discussing social justice, Lawson et. al (2006) found that for many it is fashionable today to join the “social justice bandwagon and to use our cultural lenses to impart profound platitudes that justify our advocacy” (p. 33). This study did not utilize the popularity of social justice discourse to justify advocacy for emancipated foster

youth as self-advocates; in contrast social justice was used to create deeper understandings of how our systems work to support and/ or fail foster youth in an attempt to create educational justice. Neither social justice nor educational justice may be understood absent of the other. Both served as components of the same system. As such in order to understand educational justice one must understand systemic issues related to social justice.

Research has identified two problematic systemic issues related to social justice: (1) marginalization, and (2) technical problems, with workable solutions, and adaptive problems, where there must be a shift in individual and societal values (Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Heifetz, 1994). For foster youth marginalization has meant that they have been powerless within society as they have been cared for by the foster care system, and further oppressed when they have not been educated to advocate their needs. In like manner, foster youth have been burdened by technical problems, such as high rates of education failure, unemployment, poverty, out-of-wedlock parenting, mental illness, housing instability, and victimization (Courtney & Hughes Hering, 2005). The possibility has existed that these issues may have workable solutions through self-advocacy education where youth have learned to work through issues that have served to marginalize them. There have been other issues that foster youth must face that have not been technical but adaptive and require changes in individual and social values. These issues have related but have not been limited to public policies and corresponding services intended to help foster youth, which are often limited and fragmented (Courtney & Hughes Hering, 2005). Through changed policy, services, and ultimately the value with which we view foster care for emancipating foster youth

educational justice has been increased as youth learned self-advocacy. Teaching self-advocacy alone has not provided educational justice, but rather has allowed youth to participate in processes of inquiry as noted by Friere (1993).

Therefore, educational justice has been operationalized in terms of technical and adaptive issues that have faced foster youth. Dantley and Tillman (2006), indicated that these issues have consisted as a subset of social justice that has focused marginalized groups—those groups that have been most often underserved and underrepresented and who face various forms of oppression in both schools and society. It has likewise been defined in its relation to technical and adaptive issues related to the educational opportunities to learn self-advocacy through processes of inquiry (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Freire, 1993). The idea here has been that technical issues to self-advocacy may have workable solutions, such as teaching self-advocacy and providing opportunities to learn skills, and adaptive issues which have required systems to change its attitudes about how care is provided to emancipated youth. This has necessitated recognizing that marginalized foster youth have faced oppressive conditions as they transitioned to adulthood if they have been held from inquiry and have not permitted an education that directly teaches self-advocacy. Educational leaders must work toward an understanding of educational justice through the lens of social justice, not as separate entities but as components of the same system, that has recognized foster youth as a marginalized group and the technical and adaptive issues they have faced; issues that have been resolvable through inquiry.

EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE AND THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

As previously indicated, foster youth have been acted upon violently that, “Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (Freire, 1993, p. 85). The educational injustice that has surfaced involves the process of inquiry as related to an individual’s right to decision-making, which Hoffman (2003) noted related to assessment or reflection. Often foster youth have been alienated from the decision-making process and as such have been changed into objects. These youth have been unable to participate critically, through reflection, in their own educational and social system, acting as self-advocates to make decisions for their future based on what they most value (Field & Hoffman, 1994; Hoffman, 2003). This process of alienation has been an act of violence that has objectified foster youth and has served to marginalize them as their values have not been considered. Foster youth have differed one from the other in terms of values. Some foster youth have experienced such values as better education opportunities, housing, employment, stability, and/or family. The violence that has played out has been in the opportunities available to youth once they have been released from government care; for example, having choices and having a say about ones future (i.e. decision-making) (Kennedy & Killius, 1986). Youth may have limited opportunities available because they do not understand how to access these opportunities, as they have been alienated through court decisions, social worker decisions, and foster parent decisions in the youth’s best interest. In short they have not been taught to assess, reflect, or as Freire (1993) states participate in a process of inquiry. By being alienated from decision-making

opportunities to work through life situations foster youth often have not been as prepared to serve as self-advocates. As such they have been further marginalized because they have not developed the skills to effectively inquire about their life, situation, and probable solutions to life challenges.

Marshall and Oliva (2006) pointed out that far too often those in positions of power, such as, policy makers, scholars, and practitioners, have talked but not operationalized what has needed to be done. They have advocated that educational leaders have needed to address foster youth from the perspectives of educational justice and equity (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). There has needed to be the transformation of talk into action and this has raised the question: How has educational justice been shaped or framed in the support of emancipated foster youth? What has such action looked like? Shapiro (2006) defined educational justice as "...work that engages the heart, mind, and body in ways that are exhilarating, yet highly stressful and physically exhausting" (p. 233). Therefore, educational justice has been holistic work that has engaged individuals at various internal and emotional levels as one has worked through issues of marginalization and oppression. For foster youth this has been through learning self-advocacy whereby they have achieved proficiency in decision-making for their future. Providing educational justice for foster youth has been in allowing for processes of inquiry and decision-making. Alienating foster youth has served to marginalize this group becoming another source of damaging neglect and/or violence as they transition to adulthood (Ready to Succeed, 2008).

Other sources of marginalization for foster youth related to the formal education they received, and the continued absence of opportunities for learning decision-making,

and utilizing self-advocacy. The foundational court case *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* declared that, education has been the very foundation of good citizenship and it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education (1954). For foster children the educational injustice that existed related both to their lack of education when involved in the foster care system, and education that taught self-advocacy/ decision-making. This lack of education has resulted from many factors, often outside of the control of the student, for example: multiple school transfers, lost, missing, or lagging school records, over-placement in special education settings, and multiple suspensions and holdover rates to name a few (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001).

Numerous studies have shown the importance of education attainment either through a high school diploma or general education degree (GED), (Improving Economic Opportunities for Young People Served by the Foster Care System, 1997; Gleason & Cain, 1997; Sum & Fogg, 1997; Lerman, 1996; Klerman & Karoly, 1994; Markey, 1988; Ready to Succeed, 2008). One of the studies related to foster youth came from Blome (1997) while looking at educational outcomes for foster youth who had “aged out.” Blome found that:

- Foster care youth were more likely to have dropped out of high school than non-foster youth (37% to 16%).
- Foster care youth who dropped out of high school were less likely to have received a high school diploma or a GED certificate (77% to 93%).
- Foster care youth were less likely to be enrolled in college preparatory classes than non-foster youth (15% to 32%).

- Foster care youth spent less time studying than non-foster youth.
- Participation in school activities and clubs did not differ between the two groups.
- Foster youth participated more in vocational clubs than did non-foster youth.
- Foster youth were more likely to report that they had been disciplined in school, suspended, and had been in ‘serious trouble with the law.’

Differences between foster youth and non-foster youth have included:

- School stability (changing placements at an estimated once every six months)
- The lack of family support
- Foster care mothers and fathers were less likely to monitor the student’s progress, homework, etc.
- Foster care mothers and fathers were less likely to attend parent-teacher conferences.
- Systemically, the absence of a single person with the interest, authority, and accountability for a foster child’s educational outcomes.

The significance of this study has been in the outcomes attributed between foster and non-foster youth in that foster youth typically had less support than their counterparts.

The absence of these support systems has created a lasting educational impact and youth were not adequately prepared for transition into adulthood. Reasons appeared directly linked to the lack of formal education and injustices within the educational system that assisted youth in making decisions (Bulgren, 1998).

Education has been generally viewed as a key factor in predicting adult self-sufficiency, (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1996; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 122-123). Foster youth not receiving an education due to various systemic factors, such

as high transition rates in homes and schools, has constituted an educational injustice as they have not been prepared to make informed choices based on their own best interest upon their exit from foster care (Wehmeyer, 1992; Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003). Understanding the outside factors facing foster youth, such as those identified in the Blome (1997) study, have been important because research also indicated that youth are not prepared to make informed choices regarding academic issues of achievement and potential to succeed (Unterreiner, 2008; Finkelstein, Warmesley & Miranda, 2002; Ready to Succeed, 2008; California Youth Education Task Force, 2007). When children have entered foster care, many have been academically behind their grade-level peers and have rarely caught up to them as long as they remained in care (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1996, p. 41). If foster youth have not received an adequate education while in out-of-home care they have left foster care ill equipped to enter adulthood and attain adult self-sufficiency through inquiry and decision-making (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1996, p. 41). In like manner if foster youth have not learned self-advocacy skills they have not tended not attain success in their transition to adulthood and have continued to remain in positions of marginalization (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006).

Educational justice issues, amplified in care, have had prevailing social injustices that segregate, malign, and blame teens (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). These injustices served to further alienate teens from caregivers and those who are intended to serve as support. This alienation has continued their experience of violence because they have not been taught to make decisions and evaluate them based on their values. An example of these prevailing social prejudices has been evident in studies from around the country that have shown disproportionately large numbers of former foster youth that have not

achieved high school diplomas, have jobs, have depended on welfare programs, have become homeless, have gotten involved with the criminal justice system, and have suffered from health problems (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001; Loman & Siegal, 2000; Foster & Gifford, 2005, p. 501; Courtney & Hughes-Huering, 2005, p. 27). Federal and state agencies have worked to resolve these issues through the passing of laws to help teens transition from care into adulthood, however these efforts, to resolve adaptive issues, have not been translated into effective practice(s) (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). The implications of ineffective practice have been long lasting particularly for youth in foster care who may have limited formal education (Foster & Gifford, 2005). Foster youth with little to no education and who lack other support resources have likely continued to exist in social positions of marginalization, exploitation, and powerlessness, as they have not received instruction in decision making. Providing opportunities for foster youth to have learned self-advocacy skills will help youth to attain positive adult outcomes, because youth will have decision-making skills and the ability to assess their choices (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003). Highlighting these issues may not heal the damage to foster youth caused by abuse or neglect, but it will have worked to provide the necessary knowledge and skill to thrive as adults (Ready to Succeed, 2008); providing educational justice through inquiry and decision-making.

Lindsey (1994) and Chand (2000) reported that there has continued to be an overrepresentation of children from marginalized/oppressed groups in foster care. Children in out of home placement in the United States have been removed from homes that are poverty stricken and representative of minority groupings (Lindsey, 1994; Chand, 2000). The AFCARS (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System)

reported that of 542,000 children in out of home care 55 percent were Black and /or Hispanic, 52 percent were male, and their median age had been 10.6 years. Thus the foster care system has magnified society's injustices and inequities (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). There have certainly been children from families of many varying income levels that are subjected to abuse and neglect, however, poverty exacerbates life circumstances such that youth need to go into foster care (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). Without educational justice intervention(s) through self-advocacy to no longer alienate foster youth from inquiry and decision-making these youth may have been predetermined to continue in their oppressive positions for themselves and for future generations.

FOSTER YOUTH AND THE ROLE OF SELF-ADVOCACY

Self-advocacy has focused on the future realities of youth in foster care. Through the use of self-advocacy skills youth have been provided opportunities to participate in the process of inquiry related to their future and individual needs. Through self-advocacy foster youth have recognized reality as changeable (Scapp, 2006); one's present perceptions developed from past experiences can be changed through other experiences in the future resulting in a change in self-perception. The development of self-advocacy resulting in the creation of future plans has included the following 12 components: (1) setting goals, short and long term; (2) Research—finding facts and relevant information; (3) analyzing facts and information; (4) understanding and analyzing the goals of the “other side;” (5) connecting personal goals with others' goals; (6) identifying allies and supporters; (7) analyzing situations critically; (8) identifying one's own strengths and weaknesses; (9) dealing with setbacks and rejection; (10) building on successes; (11)

reviewing and adjusting goals and strategies; and (12) making effective presentations (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006; Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). The 12 components of self-advocacy supported three important aspects of one's ability to promote his/her future: First, individuals must have developed a focus on reality (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). This has remained a need given many foster youth have had to move frequently and often have fallen behind in school. Second, the foster youth must be prepared to take responsibility to alter his/her future based on their personally assessed needs. Finally, the foster youth have developed future oriented plans to attain goals. Focusing on reality, taking responsibility, and forward planning take the 12 components of self-advocacy into consideration as he/she promoted his/her future. In its simplistic form self-advocacy has looked like one's personal responsibility for his/her reality, future, and choices through planning. As self-advocates youth have understood the importance of taking on personal responsibility for their future. In like manner individuals who have practiced self-advocacy have been proactive in their planning focusing on solutions and the strengths of a situation as opposed to focusing on reasons something cannot be accomplished (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). Foster youth have been able to learn self-advocacy and take responsibility for their future, through notions of autonomous judgments and resilience (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006).

Autonomous Judgments

Self-advocacy has acknowledged that youth need to identify goals they want to pursue, not the goals others want them to pursue (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). Youth should be respected with the right to make “autonomous judgments”, and be given responsibilities, and provided support to explore their goals and

aspirations (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). When emancipated youth have been taught to advocate for their needs, they have increased their ability to participate as citizens in our country. This goal has extended beyond *self-sufficiency*, the current goal of many government and ILP's (Independent Living Programs) (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, and Piliavin, 1996). For emancipating foster youth this goal has been difficult due to the many borders that have blocked their path on the way to adulthood (i.e. lower levels of academic achievement, aspirations, and expectations). Self-sufficiency has carried a connotation that youth have all that they need and in some sense are not in need of additional support; for foster youth emancipating this has not been the case as they must have learned to make choices and assert themselves (Ward, 2005). Many of these youth have continued to need support well into their twenties and in some cases their thirties (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005; Courtney & Heuring, 2005). The survival of these children and adolescence has occurred by overcoming odds and this pointed to their resilience to not only overcome those odds but to likewise have the ability to plan for their future.

Resiliency

Self-advocacy has promoted notions of resiliency, which has been a term commonly used to describe individuals who face inconceivable situations/ circumstances and overwhelming odds (Improving Economic Opportunities for Young People Served by the Foster Care System, 1997; Werner, 1990). Resiliency has acknowledged one's ability to 'bounce back' or successfully survive those overwhelming odds. Bensen, et. al, (2006) have operationalized resilience as ones amazing ability to succeed, even thrive, despite challenges, obstacles, and deficits that led many of their peers to make disastrous

choices. The belief that foster youth have been doomed to fail and lead unsuccessful adult lives has been a misconception since it does not acknowledge individual factors such as choice through resilience. To that point Children, Families, and Foster Care (2008) have written, that many foster youth demonstrated remarkable resilience and transition out of the system to become healthy and productive adults. In fact research on perceived social environment and adolescents' well-being and adjustment, has supported the idea that foster care youth did not differ from the comparison sample on measures of well-being including depressed mood, problem behavior, and self-esteem; to the contrary, foster care youth reported higher levels of work orientation, but lower levels of academic achievement, aspirations, and expectations (Farruggia, Greenberger, Chen, Heckhausen, 2006). While research has revealed that some youth transition successfully it is important to note that not all youth are transitioning successfully; highlighting the need to educate all foster youth regarding self-advocacy skills to prepare them for successful emancipation and adult transition.

Many foster youth, while they have experienced situations no one should have to undergo, have shown incredible resilience. Despite facing numerous challenges and obstacles many have come out of these situations remarkably successful. While some form of resiliency has been innately present in many foster youth it has been important to provide them additional support to overcome challenges, and provide teaching in self-advocacy, so as not to continue the injustice. For too long, support has come through government-regulated programs, policies, laws, and services in an attempt to mandate what matters (Fullan, 1999). It should rather have come in the form of self-advocacy through a process of inquiry and decision making that will lead this marginalized group

to rise above their oppression, through education, (Field & Hoffman, 1994; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000) and allow for educational justice through choice.

Foster youth have needed support in the form of self-advocacy to prepare them to serve as advocates in their future. They have needed opportunities to have inquired and assess their wants and needs, because one day their government parent will relinquish this power (Kennedy & Killius, 1986). Krebs and Pitcoff (2006) pointed out that most child welfare professionals, the greater community, and foster care teens themselves agree that self-advocacy is an essential and, an underdeveloped skill for teens in foster care. Foster youth should be encouraged to think and talk about their future regardless of their individual resilience. When self-advocacy has been modeled, supported, and encouraged, self-advocacy has addressed a known and significant problem of youth in not having a voice in shaping their futures that has proven necessary in successfully transitioning to independent adulthood (Ward 2005; Field & Hoffman, 1994; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000). Hearing the voices of foster youth regarding ways in which they have been supported in their journey toward self-advocacy while experiencing out-of-home care has remained a critical need. This has necessitated answering the following question: how have foster youth been prepared for emancipation to serve as self-advocates for their own future(s)? In answering this question self-advocacy must be defined and understood.

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND SELF-ADVOCACY

Self-Determination Defined

Self-Advocacy evolved from the theoretical framework self-determination theory (SDT), which primarily focused its research on youth with disabilities in school settings providing transitional services based on student's needs and interests (Field & Hoffman, 1994; IDEA P.L. 101-476; Bremer, Kachgal, Schoeller, 2003; Ward, 2005; Wehmyer, 2002). Self-advocacy has mirrored self-determination in terms of its promoting individual choice. Hoffman (2003) pointed out that instruction regarding self-determination have been important for all students, including students with and without disabilities. This concept has reflected the belief that all individuals have the right to direct their own lives and through self-determination will possess skills needed to be successful as they make the transition into adulthood (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003; Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). The overarching assumption(s) related to SDT have been that people have "inborn tendencies" that have allowed them to grow and develop psychologically, to strive and master challenges in their environment, while also supporting the need to teach these skills and not simply rely on one's inborn tendency to pick up these skills through life (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; University of Illinois at Chicago National Research & Training Center, 2002). In short, SDT has acknowledged that these youth have possessed the power to control their own lives, and have been capable of overcoming the challenges they have faced y and then plan for their future. There has been a focus on the attitudes of individuals and their abilities to act as the "primary causal agents" for their lives as they have made decisions (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003; Wehmeyer, 1992, p. 305).

SDT has promoted self-advocacy through individual choice with regard to setting goals, making decisions, seeing options, solving problems, speaking up for oneself, understanding the supports needed for success and knowing how to evaluate outcomes, which are linked with the 12 tenets addressed previously (Martin & Marshall, 1996; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Youth who have practiced self-determination have been viewed as engaging in processes that have been goal-directed, self-regulated, and autonomous (Hoffman, 2003). These processes again have been related to self-advocacy in that they too have promoted youth being goal-directed, self-directed, and making autonomous judgments. In utilizing these skills and attitudes youth have had greater ability to assume successful adult roles within society as they have begun to make choices for their lives (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward, & Wehmeyer, 1998).

Kennedy and Kilius (1986) argued that self-advocacy has been about promoting the idea of people speaking for themselves, and the belief that self-advocacy has been about having choices and having a say about the services one needs. Martin and Marshall (1995) supported this idea explaining that self-determined people have been individuals who know how to make choices through an awareness of personal needs, making one's needs known, evaluating progress toward meeting goals, adjusting their performance, and creating unique approaches to solve problems. In this manner youth have been provided the "dignity of risk;" an individuals right to their fare share of risk experiences in life that all individuals have faced from time to time (Perske, 1972; Nirje, 1972).

Care providers of foster youth have tended to exert their authority and power in ways that have prevented these youth from developing self-advocacy and self-direction out of a desire to protect them from the risk of future harm. Having prevented them from

the dignity of risk has kept them from important life experiences that would have contributed to their adult development. Self-advocacy has necessitated these youth be provided opportunities to (a) acquire skills such as identifying options, anticipating potential consequences, and accessing resources and information, (b) practice those skills, and (c) reflect on and learn from their experiences (Hoffman, 2003). Foster youth have needed opportunities to develop these skills, practice them, and reflect on the experience and outcome. Educational justice has necessitated immersing foster youth in the process of inquiry in exercising choice in decision-making. When care providers have allowed youth to learn self-advocacy, practice it, and reflect on it, through educational justice, care providers have supported their transition to adulthood.

Self-advocacy has been accomplished through the ability to allow youth to fail (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003). Wehmeyer and Kelchner (1996) pointed out that failure experiences have been simply learning experiences if they have been mitigated. Stated simply, experiences of failure can be experiences of learning if youth have been provided opportunities to try the experience again with a different strategy, technique, or approach. By protecting youth from these experiences their choices have been controlled and their ability to experience failure and try different strategies has been hindered. In this manner, youth have been prevented in their ability to learn self-advocacy, practice, and reflect on their experiences, which has been important to their adult transition. Providing opportunities for youth to have learned and at times fail has been what has allowed them to successfully transition to adulthood. Limiting foster youth and safeguarding them from their own choices has served to prevent them from learning. When youth have been taught self-advocacy, rooted in self-determination theory, youth

have learned through such participation the decision-making processes of their lives and have gained the power to set goals, take risks, and reflect.

Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy a Link to Systems

Youth have needed their systems (social service agencies, guardians, education institutions, etc.) to provide support as they transition to adulthood. A systems approach to self-advocacy has allowed for the participant groups, institutions, and individuals within the system to work together at building self-advocacy in foster youth (NCWD/Youth, 2009). A foster youth's system can have promoted self-advocacy skills teaching youth to make choices, explore possibilities, take risks, problem solve, self-advocate, develop self-esteem, set and plan goals, and understand their situation(s) (Bremer, Kachgal, Schoeller, 2003). The process of building self-advocacy skills has involved all parts of one's system in order to reach success. These systems should not only have supported the physical wellbeing of foster youth, but should have included teaching skills in self-advocacy through SDT and have provided real-world opportunities to learn the skills of self-advocacy. In this manner people in youths' support system (family, teachers, employers, institutions, etc.) have needed to learn and be committed to providing environments that both create and maintain processes of inquiry, decision-making, and reflection. To have alienated or denied foster youth from these experiences has been to marginalize this group and act violently toward them.

Foster youth's needs have changed as they develop into young adults. Research has shown that the average young person must rely on parental support during the transitional period to adulthood, and does not become self-sufficient until age 26 (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007; Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008). In

support of their children, parents have often provided for them through financial means and spend a median of \$44,500 after they reach the age of 18 (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007). Foster youth have received less than 5% of that total allocations provided by the state for their support (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007). Other support has included but has not been limited to housing, medical care, insurance, food, and advice. (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007). There has continued to be the need for youth transitioning out of foster care into adulthood to have support relevant to this period of transitioning (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001). Even though emancipated youth may not need the same protection they received as children, they have continued to need support appropriate to the challenges of young adulthood because their context has changed. Support for emancipated youth has meant addressing such issues as learning disabilities, limited life skills, health or emotional/ behavioral problems, limited economic resources, joblessness, homelessness, and poor familial support from birth families, caregiver guardians or adoptive parents, and the state (Courtney & Huering, 2005).

Research illustrated that the system should not change, but the character of the relationship with the system has needed to change from one of protection from physical harm to develop a more peer-like relationship to allow the foster youth to discourse with members of the system about difficulties faced in transitioning to adulthood (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005; Foster and Gifford, 2005). This change has necessitated allowing foster youth to begin their own decision-making regarding choices for their own lives. Through changed relationships with those adults involved in the foster care system, youth would have evidenced being in positions of power to choose rather than being

alienated from their decision-making. The system therefore in this new relation has served as a guide to youth and not control them.

SELF-ADVOCACY AND FOSTER CARE

Research showed self-advocacy increased foster youth success through their transition into adulthood (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006; Settersten Jr., Furstenberg, Jr., & Rumbaut, 2005). Foster youth who have acted as self-advocates have faced acknowledging their marginalization, identifying the situations that pose technical and adaptive problems, learning self-advocacy for their own future. When these goals have been attained, educational justice has been advanced. These youth have recognized their marginalization through alienation from independent decision-making and processes of inquiry. There has needed to be instruction oriented to real world applicability in becoming Self-Advocates (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ward, 2005). Self-advocacy has manifested itself in: seeking a good job, getting a promotion, dissatisfied customer(s) returning a purchase(s), tenant negotiations of security deposit, receiving proper attention for medical care, etc. (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). This has been self-advocacy in that any situation in which one navigates her/ his own need is a situation in which she/he has advocated for self. Without these skills foster youth have not been prepared to create goals appropriate for advancing their future (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). These youth as a result have often failed in their transition to adulthood, because they have not been able to assess or inquire about their needs, wants, and values (Kennedy & Killius, 1986).

The authors Krebs and Pitcoff (2006) noted that, the only consistent individual a foster care teen can rely on during their time in foster care have been themselves;

primarily because the adults in their lives have been inconsistent resulting in their inability to build effective relationships with adults (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). Krebs and Pitcoff (2006) supported YAC's self-advocacy model as "empowering teens" and "teaching them...the importance of gaining information, understanding the needs of the other side, presenting one's strengths, combining personal needs with organizational goals, as well as using communication skills to have successfully navigated hurdles and challenges of independence," when they evaluated YAC's program (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 127). The authors developed structured classes to teach self-advocacy as a result of their research and have continued researching foster youth's learned skills such as: (a) focusing on the issues and not personalizing situations; (b) to whom they should direct their requests; (c) presenting strengths; and (d) educating the agency about how a certain action could benefit all parties. From their research they realized: "self-advocacy to be a core independent living tool" (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 128). As such this tool can potentially have provided an opportunity for youth to develop their own goals and reach them, while depending on the one person who has been most consistent in their lives; themselves. This research allowed emancipated foster youth to share stories about how they felt they were prepared to confront adult transition and act as self-advocates. These youth were forward planning, meaning they were, reflecting, questioning, and critically analyzing their future according to the goals and values they had identified. As such these youth took control of their futures.

Understanding the perceived reality of youth in acting as self-advocates has been a continuous need. Scapp (2006), discussed perceptions of reality when he stated, "this is how the world is anyway" (p. 37). The statement has revealed the reality of youth who

have been denied the opportunity of learning and practicing self-advocacy in shaping one's reality. However, Scapp (2006) articulated a view of reality that is changeable if one is willing to struggle. Thus reality has been defined as alterable and subject to change. Emancipated foster youth, by serving as self-advocates, have learned to view reality as transitioning and changeable through knowing what they want and how to achieve it (Wehmeyer, 2002). In this manner their reality has involved asserting their presence, making their needs known, evaluating their goals and progress toward those goals, adjusting their performance, and creating unique approaches to solve problems (Wehmeyer, 2002; Martin & Marshall, 1995). Addressing the present reality of meeting the survival needs of foster youth (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, etc.) has continued to be a need. Added to meeting this need, however, has been the necessity of teaching and modeling self-advocacy because foster youth have needed to master this skill.

Successful emancipation has not meant that these youth became totally self-sufficient; to the contrary, youth have learned consequences for choices made and that effective choices involved being reflective and searching out multiple options rather than making impulsive decisions (be they positive, negative, or other) (Hoffman, 2003; Wehmeyer, 2002; Martin & Marshall, 1995). Research noted successful emancipation has equated to self-advocacy where foster youth have found a purpose in life related to their future and have tried to align their decisions in a manner consistent with their values and purposes (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006; Doll, Sands, Wehmeyer, & Palmer, 1996). When care providers have limited their actions to meeting the physical needs of foster youth, they have created the danger of dependency. Such dependency has served to further marginalize foster youth in that they are not prepared to make necessary decisions for

their future. The goal of educational justice for foster youth through changes in the power relation for these youth has resulted in empowering them to reach beyond their marginalization and take control of their own futures. In this manner youth have been able to inquire about their present situations and future reality in a manner consistent with their individually assessed values.

The government has taken responsibility for the care of children in the foster system, but has struggled to adequately prepare them for their transition to adulthood because they have not been taught skills to make choices and decisions autonomously (Hoffman, 2003). Through self-advocacy youth have learned skills to prepare for adult transition and make autonomous judgments. The educational justice dimension has been promoted as these youth begin to speak out for their needs and participate in processes of inquiry (Kennedy & Killius, 1986; Friere, 1993). For years the government has parented children and provided their basic needs without adequately teaching them how to advocate for their own needs (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). However, emancipated foster youth must be taught self-advocacy to serve their needs, goals, and future aspirations.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

In this chapter the current research literature was revealed and revealed ways self-advocacy has been empowering to foster youth transitioning to emancipation (Children's Advocacy Institute, 2007; Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). By focusing on the education of self-advocacy, the need of foster youth exiting the system have been served as they prepared for independence with the goal of increased likelihood of successful adult transitioning (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Reeve, 2002). Research related to other educational justice issues such as marginalization, powerlessness, and

violence was reviewed. The review supported the need that foster youth have needed to have their voices heard through the sharing of their insights, perceptions, and perspectives. This review of the literature has prepared me to shape my formation of my research problem, develop my overarching question, and choose the methodology that is most suitable to my research interest of examining foster youth's perceptions of how they have been prepared to act as self-advocates.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

STRUCTURE FOR THE STUDY

RATIONALE FOR QUALITATIVE DESIGN

The problem statement guiding my research was: according to such democratic ideals as self-determination and the pursuit of happiness, there are foster youth who face emancipation without having been taught how to become self-advocates and been nurtured to possess the self-efficacy necessary for the responsibilities of adulthood. There is a need for my study so that through the voices of the youth studied may inform foster care providers, teachers and administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders about the needs of these youth during one of the most important transitions in the human life span: from adolescence to young adulthood.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my study was to understand the experiences of emancipated foster youth transitioning into adulthood as an educational justice issue. I examined and described the perceptions of emancipated former foster youth in terms of how the foster care system prepared and/or failed to prepare them to act as self-advocates. I was able to attain insights from the results of my study that may help other youth facing the transition into emancipation. The three people who participated in my study consisted of youth who were 18 years of age and all were females. There was an additional participant, a male, but he later chose not to participate. Each person was interviewed regarding her perceptions of self-advocacy development in her own life. Over the course of four months, participants were interviewed three times.

Rationale for the phenomenological study. A phenomenological approach was appropriate for my study because I wanted to describe and explain the world as those involved in a phenomenon perceived it (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006). A phenomenological study design was chosen because it has achieved status as a viable method for doing education research (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006; Yin, 2006). It enabled me to study a phenomenon systemically that included individuals (Merriam, 1988). This methodology was appropriate given that through this design I studied the meaning participants gave regarding what the world looked like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that reliably to others who are interested in that setting (Merriam, 1984, 1988). A qualitative phenomenological study methodology was used to capture the stories, insights, and perceptions of these young people. These participants were selected because they were successfully serving as self-advocates.

This meant that I needed to interview them, transcribe their interviews verbatim, analyze the data for themes or categories of meaning, and then write thick descriptions of their experiences. I used member checking to increase the credibility of my study and to ensure the knowledge I was constructing was accurate according to their experiences.

In essence, it enabled me to describe the experiences of foster youth serving as self-advocates. This research design guided me “in the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting observations, and is the logical model of proof that allows the researcher to draw inferences concerning causal relations among variables under investigation” (Yin, 1984, p. 28).

PROCEDURES: PHASES OF THE STUDY

I used the following four phases in completing my study: Planning, Beginning Data Collection, Basic Data Collection, and Data Process and Analysis.

Phase 1: Planning

Initial Interview Questions. There were six semi-structured interview questions prepared for the participants. Semi-structured questions were advocated by Yin (1984). Yin stressed the use of such questions had been to elicit the stories of participants. The perceptions and interpretations of their experience are vital to this process and the purpose of this study. These questions were as follows:

1. What are the descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
2. What opinions, intentions, goals, desires, and values are described related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
3. What feelings or emotions possibly are expressed in the sharing of the participants' experiences of being former foster youth and their preparation for self-advocacy?
4. What is the understanding of the participants related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
5. How do the participants describe their experiences in sensory terms (i.e., what they said, felt, heard, smelled, touched) regarding the phenomenon of self-advocacy?
6. What background or demographic information is shared during the interview?

Choice of setting. According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975), any organization that “meets the substantive and theoretical interests of the researcher and that is available for study might be chosen as a research site” (p. 12). In choosing a program that supported emancipated foster youth for study, the following advice by Bogdan (1972) was heeded:

A basic step in choosing a project is to go out in the world with a substantive or theoretical interest in mind and to survey the possibilities. There are geographic limits and other practical considerations, which will define how wide your search for a setting will be. Often, the choice of a setting may be determined by such factors as one’s having a friend who knows the “gatekeeper” of a potentially interesting organization (p. 12).

Dealing with gatekeepers. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), gatekeepers are those people within the setting that the researcher wants to investigate who have the authority to grant permission for the study. Obtaining official permission is important:

Formal organizations are approached through single or multiple avenues at one or more status levels. Contact through top-level officials can ensure organizational sanction for the research (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 88).

As such, I had to allow for voluntary participation from each of the participants selected, which necessitated dealing with one gatekeeper: the founder of the INSPIRE program. The process of gaining entry began with several phone calls and email contact with the founder of the program. These calls and email communication served as meetings to arrange my visit to workshops provided through INSPIRE.

Participant recruitment. I had access to foster care youth through my involvement in a program called INSPIRE. Participants were recruited from INSPIRE, a program

designed to provide support for emancipated foster youth by providing opportunities for apartments, college classes, part-time jobs, and free counseling. This program had been selected because it had been composed of youth who had been emancipated from foster care. It allowed for a purposeful sampling to find the particular type of participant in one central location (Yin, 1984; Merriam, 1998; Myles & Hubberman, 1994). The program goals were life skills training, seminars, and workshops for youth as well as housing and mental health support. Each of the participants in my study were participants in the INSPIRE program.

Sampling. I used purposeful sampling because qualitative inquiry typically focuses on small samples and/or small cases and I described the phenomenon in and in terms of phenomenological research an understanding of a phenomenon in depth. This enabled me to select “information rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (Laughton et.al., 2002, p. 46; Creswell, 2007). I used a type of purposeful sampling known as criteria sampling and ensured all participants experienced the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2007).

The criteria included: (1) the participant needed to be a foster youth who had been in an out-of-home placement for at least a year; (2) the participant needed to be 18 years of age or older; (3) the participant needed to be willing to talk about experiences he/she encountered in transition from foster care. I asked potential participants to complete an Information Sheet. This sheet included a potential participant’s name and age; sex, length of time in care; the number of out of home placements; the number of schools attended and completion status; support from advocates; and initial self-advocacy assessment.

Voluntary Participation. I understood that selecting participants was possibly the most critical component in qualitative research (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006). I wanted the people in the study to feel comfortable during the interviews. Thus, the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (1982) was heeded:

While you may get official permission, you might have your study sabotaged by subjects. Getting permission to conduct the study involves more than getting an official blessing: It involves laying the ground work for good rapport with those with whom you will be spending time, so they will accept you and what you are doing (p. 122).

Keeping this need in mind, before beginning the initial interview with each participant, I restated the purpose of my study and answered any questions that were asked. In preparing my explanation, I used the following questions and recommendations that were formulated by Bogdan and Biklen (1982):

1. What are you actually going to do? A general rule to follow in answering all questions is to be honest. Do not lie, but do not be too specific or lengthy in your explanations...
2. Will you be disruptive? ...Assure them that you will not be making excessive demands and you will attempt to be sensitive to their problems and requirements. Share with them your intention of fitting your schedule around theirs.
3. What are you going to do with your findings? Most people are asked this question because they fear negative publicity or the political use of the information the researcher gathers...Tell them that you do not plan to use anyone's name and that you will disguise the location...

4. Why us? People often want an explanation of why they or their organizations were singled out for study...

Unless you have come to see a particular group whose reputation is exemplary, it is usually important that you communicate to people in the setting that you are not so concerned about the particular people in the study, or in the particular organization where you may be collecting data. Rather, your interests center on the general topic...of whatever specific aspect you are pursuing...

5. What will we get out of this? ...You should decide what it is you are prepared to give. Some want feedback about what you find, a report, or even a meeting with you after the work has been completed (p. 123-124).

These questions and recommended responses helped me to present my explanation in a clear concise manner.

I explained that I was conducting a study on the perceptions of emancipated former foster youth in terms of how the foster care system prepared and/or failed to prepare them to act as self-advocates. Permission was requested to record the interviews so that they could be transcribed verbatim. Participants were assured that no one, other than me, would have access to tapes or the transcribed notes. I stated that the transcribed interviews and field notes were invaluable to my study because through analyzing them I could write descriptions of the themes that emerged. An emphasis was placed on the fact that the nature of the study was descriptive and not evaluative. The participants were told that several interviews would need to take place because I needed to check with them on the accuracy of my perceptions. They were told that I would be as non disruptive of their time as possible.

The participants also were informed that their anonymity would be protected. I did this by disguising and keeping confidential the identity and location of the participants. Finally, I explained that studying the perceptions of emancipated foster youth would enable me to develop possible insights that may help other youth facing the transition into emancipation. I emphasized that this was the reason that everyone's participation in the study was important. The explanation concluded with a statement of gratitude for their willingness to participate in the study and my commitment to share the findings with them if they wanted this information.

Phase 2: Beginning Data Collection.

Initial Contact, Meeting and Informed Consent. The process to recruit participants began with a phone call to the director and signing an Access Consent letter (See Attachment 1), which allowed me access to work with the youth in the INSPIRE program. Once the letter had been signed I spoke at a Life Skills² meeting to explain my research and its objectives. Over 20 emancipated foster youth were present that night, some with their own children, and others were program directors. At the time the youth had been receiving instruction on proper dental hygiene (i.e. brushing, flossing, and regular dental cleaning). The session was informal in that the youth were allowed to sit on couches, chairs, or the floor, in some cases each other's lap's as space was limited. During the session youth asked questions of the presenters and received information pertaining to where they could go to have free dental cleanings. I was allowed to speak to them after the presentation regarding dental cleanings.

² Classes that are designed to get youth thinking about their long-term goals, and are paired with mentors.

I had explained the purpose of my presence at the meeting and my research. I shared the purpose of my research, research question, methodology/ process of data collection, any risk involved, and the way in which confidentiality would be honored. Each participant interested was given an Informed Consent Form (Attachment 2) for participation and a Screening Questionnaire (Attachment 3) that asked eight questions. The youth had some questions regarding my interest in foster youth, particularly those emancipated, and whether they would be compensated for their participation. I shared with them how I became interested in the topic and informed them that their participation would be on a voluntary basis. While I stated that there would be no remuneration.

I spoke with the program director, she informed me that she would collect the documents from the participants and get them to me once they had been collected. I thanked her and the youth for the opportunity and left the session.

After I attended the INSPIRE meeting six youth returned both forms: one male and five female foster youth. I called each person to set up a meeting for the first session. I confirmed four appointments from the six. The other two were left a voice message that was not returned. I intended for my research to look at three participants, one male and two female, however the one male had not responded to my call and as such I chose to continue with those that I had been able to get in contact. I scheduled appointments with the four female participants for the following week. There were three females who participated in my study.

Description of research participants. These participants were given the following pseudonyms: Erika, Nancy, and Sara. A table has been used to provide basic information about each of the participants that will be further explained throughout the study:

Table 1: Research Participants

PARTICIPANT	NUMBER OF YEARS IN CARE and AGE
Erika	2 years Age 17 to 19 years old.
Nancy	1 year Age 17 to 18 years old.
Sara	3 years Age 15

Building a web of credibility. I built credibility based on qualitative inquiry that views ...the person as an immanently active, meaning-constructing being, to the importance of context, and to the pivotal role of the “lived experience.” This fundamentally changes the role of the subject in traditional inquiry to that of research-participant. Understanding of the natural, real life context is seen as crucial to gain insights, and inquiry occurs in real life settings and in relation to real life events. The role of the researcher in these forms of inquiry changes from a measurer, controller of variables, and executor of research design to that of a careful and aware listener, observer, absorber, participator, organizer of data, and able narrator. The privileged symbol system for data gathering, data organization, reporting of findings, and a judgment of significance shifts from a mathematical symbol system to the language of our everyday discourse. “Method” is no longer an unambiguous set of fixed rules but has defined as organized inquiry and careful accounting of data gathering and analysis strategies, which are always in

the service of, rather than in control of, the research question, the context, and the flow of events (Heshusius, 1989, p. 413).

In this study, a web of credibility consisted of: (1) checking my interpretations of the data with the participants in study and (2) using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) during category generation. The constant comparative method consisted of comparing the similarities and differences of the major categories of incidents and perceptions. Finally, I achieved theoretical relevance by comparing the categories to the existing literature.

Phase 3: Basic Data Collection.

In-depth Interviews. An interview has been defined as “any face-to-face conversational exchange where one person elicits information from another” (Denzin, 1970a, p. 186). Participants were asked to participate in three one-hour data individual interviews. The first interview served as an exploratory session to investigate and examine the participant with the hope of finding out about them. In like manner serving as an introduction to how each perceived their transition to adulthood and preparation to serve as a self-advocate. The second interview clarified participant perceptions and gained deeper insight into their development as self-advocates. This interview allowed data to be verified from the previous session and to check for accuracy. The third and final interview had been confirmatory to insure all information had been accurate according to the youth as they experienced it (Myles and Hubberman, p. 36, 1994). When I conducted the interviews, I used probing and clarifying questions rather than accepting “merely a summary of responses” (Bogdan and Taylor, 1975, p. 98). When using this type of interview,

there is no attempt to standardize either the interview setting or the format of the interview setting or the format of the interview so that each respondent is presented with the same set of stimuli” (Denzin, 1970a, p. 126).

Instead of manipulating or arranging in advance “under conditions often controlled by an investigator, “phenomena are studied as they occur naturally (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 10).

These interviews were guided by the six interview questions and eight semi-structured interview questions prepared for the participants (See pg. 11-12).

As important issues began to emerge, interviews that were more structured and focused were conducted. The use of different types of interviews in qualitative research is not uncommon:

At the beginning of the project, for example, it might be important to use the more free-flowing, exploratory interview because your purpose at that point is to get a general understanding of a range of perspectives on a topic. After the investigatory work has been done, you may want to structure interviews more in order to get comparable data across a larger sample or to focus on particular topics that emerged during the preliminary interviews (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p. 134).

Thus, the follow-up interviews of the youth were more structured. Although the same types of information were desired from all respondents in using the semi-structured interviews, the particular phrasing of questions and their order was “redefined to fit the characteristics of each respondent” (Denzin, 1970b, p. 125).

Throughout the data-gathering phase of my research, I went back to the foster youth to share my findings with them. This process of checking and revising was done to promote accuracy of perceptions and increase the credibility of my study. This process of checking and clarifying was based on the belief that:

interviewers and respondents, through repeated reformulations of questions and responses, strive to arrive together at the meanings that both can understand. The relevance and appropriateness of questions and responses emerges through and is realized in the discourse itself (Mishler, 1986, p. 65).

My phenomenological study explored the experiences of three foster youth preparing for emancipation and the experience with acting as self-advocates. All of the initial interviews of the youth began with an explanation of the purpose of the study. Also, at that time, permission was sought to record the interviews and participants were assured that no one would hear the tapes except myself. They were told that the tapes would be transcribed verbatim and then studied to discover common themes. Everyone gave their permission to be taped.

All of the recordings were of sufficient quality that transcriptions were accomplished smoothly. All of the recordings were transcribed using a word processor. During the process of transcribing, personal, theoretical, and methodological notes were added as insights or questions arose in my mind.

I wanted to be sure that my data collection and dissemination of findings were done ethically and in a way that resulted in credibility (Merriam, 1988). The only ethical dilemma I faced was my relationship with one of the foster youth. I was her counselor prior during high school. Because she had graduated high school and was now an

emancipated youth, I included her in the study after consultation with my dissertation chair.

Role of Researcher. McMillan and Schumacher (2001) explained that there are possible roles for a researcher: “possible roles are observer, full participant, participant observer, insider-observer, interviewer, and the dual role of participant-researcher” (p. 435). The role that was most consistent with conducting phenomenological research was that of interviewer. I therefore adopted the role of interviewer for my study.

My role as the researcher was that of interviewer. My view of interviewing was as a series of steps in a procedure (Creswell, 2007):

- Identifying interviewees based on purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994)
- Determine what type of interview is practical and will net the most useful information to answer research questions.
- Use adequate recording procedures when conducting interviews.
- Design and use an interview protocol (See Attachment 4: Interview Guidelines Script and Timelines).
- Refine interview questions and procedures
- Determine the place for conducting the interview...a quiet location free from distractions (this was established by the participants themselves).
- After arriving at the interview site, obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study. Review the purpose of the study, the amount of time that will be needed to complete the interview, and plans for using the results from the interview.
- During the interview, stay to the questions, complete the interview within the time

specified (if possible), be respectful and courteous, and offer a few questions in advance.

- Finally, be a good listener rather than frequent speaker during the interview (Creswell, 2007).

As the interviewer I strictly held to these procedures. As such, each was adhered to with all interviewees and in all interviews. Within the role of interviewer, I used an MP3 recorder to capture the interviews. I then transcribed the audio verbatim. I also took field notes after the interviews to capture thoughts regarding the interviews. Thus, transcribed interviews served as my data sources.

Phase 4: Completion – Data Process and Analysis

Constant comparative method. The invention or plan of action phase and the discovery or data gathering phase of research design contained within them the fourth phase. This latter phase was interpretation, and denoted a phase of analysis that resulted in understanding (Kirk and Miller, 1986). In other words, analysis began early in the study and occurred throughout the data-gathering phase of the study (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984). Concepts not only come from the data, “but are systemically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 6).

The constant comparative method formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was used throughout this study to analyze data. This process involved “perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, and ordering; establishing linkages and relationships; and speculating” (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 167). Through this

process of comparing key events or ideas while continuing to collect data and searching for reoccurring examples of them, categories were generated.

Category generation. While transcribing the interviews I looked for regularities in the thoughts and phrases of participants (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982). Similarities and differences were noted and typed, and after typing the initial interviews I printed them out on my computer and read them several times, looking once again for reoccurring events or ideas. As these were discovered, they were written down in the margins.

The next phase of category generation consisted of rereading all of the initial interviews. Tentative coding categories were formed. The codes consisted of short phrases representing the reoccurring actions and thoughts of participants. These tentative coding categories guided future interviews and observations.

The codes needed to be placed in a form that made sorting them possible. Therefore, each of the codes, representing a unit of meaning, was written on a blank sheet of paper and organized in a chronological flow chart. Throughout the process of analysis, categories were studied for their theoretical importance. This involved two emphases. First, theoretical relevance was achieved by relating the categories to the existing literature review to determine areas of agreement and disagreement. Second, I conducted my investigation by carefully rereading the categories and verifying my perceptions with those of the participants that resulted in explanatory power. This process, referred to as “theoretical saturation” by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), involved working to exhaust “the dimensions of the categories” (p. 69). As the categories continued to reappear, descriptions of these categories and their properties were refined. Data from these interviews were coded. Each code was written on a blank sheet of paper and graphically

organized. The final categories and their properties were then studied to discover common themes connecting the categories.

This phase finalized data collection and began the process of analyzing the data into meaningful themes. The words, stories, and experiences of youth were analyzed to understand their experiences both as related to theory and each other. During analysis, patterns were compared to theory and the other participating members. The patterns determined whether the data collected fit the theory or if it had been contrary. In this way analysis helped to support the previous research presented or provide alternative views in theory and between cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4

In this chapter I presented the structure for my study. The rationale for qualitative research was presented and the purpose of my study was addressed. The rationale for the use of phenomenological research methodology was explained. I described the phases of my study should someone wish to replicate it in the future.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Findings and Interpretations

The findings of my research study and its interpretations will help in resolving whether foster youth perceived their out of home placement prepared them to act as self-advocates. I chose an overarching research question to guide the development of the interview purpose. The overarching question was: How were emancipated foster youth prepared during their time in foster care to serve as self-advocates as they transitioned to adulthood? My intention was that my study would allow emancipated foster youth the opportunity to tell their stories and share experiences regarding their preparation as self-advocates as they transition to adulthood. The information was presented in such a way as to best share their perceptions and experiences through quotations, narratives, and tables (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006; Yin, 1984).

I outlined in this chapter the stories of three individuals. Each person was an emancipated foster youth over the age of 18 who was in care for one year or more. The individuals were given the following pseudonyms: Erika, Nancy, and Sara. I used quotations, narrative, and tables to capture my findings.

PARTICIPANT CASE HISTORY

Case history served to provide a thick description of the participants involved in the phenomenological study in terms of data collection. While these individuals were described the description has not sensationalized their stories in a journalistic fashion. Rather, I described their individual life experiences. No distinction was made with regard to the type of abuse and/or neglect, and the specific incidents were not described. What

was described was the time, experiences, and stories of these youth both during their time in foster care and after their time in care as emancipated foster youth.

Erika

Erika was a Hispanic female age 18. She was in foster care for two years and emancipated from care shortly after her 18th birthday. Her story was one where she and her sister were moved out of their home and placed in foster care because Child Protection Services determined that they were being abused in their home with their parents. Erika stated: “it’s sad because I only remember how they were with me. I don’t know how they are now.” She continued to describe her feelings for both her mother and father as she stated:

I kind of feel two things for my dad and I feel one of them is, I’m disappointed in him, and the other one is I still love my dad cause he’s my dad. As far as my mom goes, I don’t know, I feel bad for her in a sense, but then like I still care for her a lot. As far as feeling bad for her I think she needs help. I feel bad saying that (because) everybody will always defend their mom, they will never put their mom down or their dad, I see my mom as a person now, not a mom. I don’t think she really knew what it was like to be a good parent, the basic needs, like feed and clothe your kids and keep them from harm. She taught me some things like learning to be social, and not to be rude to people you first meet, and if you have a boyfriend, like him for who he is on the inside not just his looks. So she taught me some good things, but as far as education, no she didn’t really influence me as much. I just see my parents as people on their own and me on my own. I kind of stopped having parents when I went into foster care.

During her two years in foster care she spent time in two different foster homes. The first home she described as okay, but the people only spoke Spanish. I asked if it was a problem for her and she commented that generally it was not a problem because she herself spoke Spanish. Her issue was that she felt her English was better than her Spanish. It was because of her lack of fluency with Spanish that she felt at times unable to express herself as clearly as she felt she could in English. She was moved from this home to a different home after a few months. Both she and her sister while in care were placed in different homes.

Erika stayed in her second foster home from the time she was placed until shortly after her 18th birthday. In this home she remarked about a single mother who took her into her family with her other teenage daughter, a few years younger than Erika. She commented about this home as being better than the first foster home because the parent spoke English fluently. She also noted that the mother in this home helped her to learn a great deal. Erika stated, “She helped me a lot to always have faith in God...She’s very Christian and so she helped me keep believing in him, and she helped me to be classy, which is really cool, you know, proper, manners...” In an attempt to clarify what she meant by “classy” Erika stated,

Classy as in when it comes to a school I went to, for example, had a lot of students there that was put there because they got into trouble a lot from the regular high school. When she [the foster mother] taught me what classy was [she showed me] you don’t have to get into fights, you don’t start fights, and it’s kind of like having pride in yourself...confidence. She taught me classy people

are also educated, and I wanted to be that, so that's why I stayed in school. I like to be that classy girl.

While in this home Erika participated in two different schools different from her home school when she was living with her birth parents. The first school was a traditional high school. She left this school because she was behind in her credits and enrolled in a continuation high school program. While in the continuation high school she noted an English teacher who she stated, "helped...by giving me the courage and the motivation to finish school...(and) to continue to go on to school and [get an] education." The teacher told all of the class, "You are my kids and if you need help I'm here after school everyday for about an hour or two." She described this teacher as her own personal counselor; someone she could go to with her problems and she indicated this helped out a lot. It was from this school that she earned her credits and graduated on time. Shortly after graduation she enrolled at the local community college and got a job working at a fast food restaurant.

It was during her 18th birthday that she began the paperwork for emancipation. She stated that it was about a month after turning 18 that she was emancipated. She described the process as they brought her to court, gave her \$200, had her sign the papers and that was it. Erika noted that she couldn't stay because "her (the foster mother) daughter was a mess and a bad influence for me and then the choices that my foster mom was making at the time made me feel uncomfortable with the living situations, so I knew I wanted to leave." Erika also described the distance of her foster mother's home to the community college and the bus commute required. It was out of these reasons that she felt she would like to move to a city where busing was more centralized and ran longer

hours verses where she was currently living and there was not much public transportation.

Once emancipated Erika stated that she spoke to her former social worker about the next steps. She stated that the social worker indicated that she would have a social worker until the age of 21 but made it clear that it was up to her to continue meeting with the social worker. Erika commented on the following words stated by her social worker regarding emancipation:

It's really up to us, what you decide, what we want to do with our life. If you just want to start working or get pregnant, or married, or whatever, but honestly for foster kids who really want to pursue education they need, what I needed, was someone to show me that they really cared about my life. You know, like they wanted to see me be successful and they actually believe that I can do this instead of looking at me in a way of, well look at your parents, now look at you. 'Did they teach you much?' 'Sorry you don't have much to look forward to...'

She continued to discuss how individuals often did not believe in her because of her situation, but that in the face of this "gave it a try." She noted, "I think that's the key, to keep faith and hope that you can do it."

Nancy

Nancy was a female Caucasian student who was 18 years old. She too was taken out of her home because it was confirmed that she was being abused and/or neglected. At the time she had no under-age brothers and sisters living at home, but a brother who was over 18. She noted that in her home she was "the mother" in that she did many of the "responsible" things like making grocery lists and doing laundry. She noted that she

knew what was going on was wrong but it was all she knew. In time she felt she needed to tell someone and did. As a result she was placed in foster care, with her brother's acknowledgment that she had "done the right thing" and "this would only benefit her" as opposed to hurt her. He encouraged her during her time in care not to give up and that she would be out soon.

She spent one year in foster care. During her time in care she was placed in one home and remained there until she was emancipated. She described the family as being older, "age 60-70," and the experience as being okay. She commented about her foster parents as giving her "freedom" and "choices." She stated, "they gave me freedom and said if you want to do this, you know that there's choices, they said, 'I'm going to let you do this, but remember, you're the adult.'" Nancy also noted that she for the most part felt independent in that her "foster parents really never did anything." She described this experience with the following example, "If I had to go to a doctor's appointment, they would (say) okay go, and come back with a note for missing class...so like it's 8:00 in the morning and I have to go up and get it myself [i.e. had to get the note from the doctor excusing her from school]." While she recognized that most of what she did was without the support of her foster parents she did acknowledge that it helped her in the way that she does not depend on anyone. She uses her ex-boyfriend, who was a foster youth also, as an example in that "he depended on his foster mom for everything, (for example) taking him to work (etc.)," she commented that he will not have that afterwards and needs to be able to take care of some things on his own. She pointed out that most people don't do things on their own and that when you depend on someone it can "have its downfalls." She noted, "you just have to realize you're on your own."

Nancy's emancipation was during her 18th birthday as well as Erika. She stated that she did receive support from her social worker in getting her California ID. She noted that the actual process took about a week. She also pointed to the fact that she would have gone to court but it would have taken longer and she perceived her foster parents as "pushing her out" because they were no longer receiving payment for her. She stated, "I was already 18 and my foster parents were like why isn't she already out...she needs to hurry and get out." From this perception she commented, "Oh, god, it's not my fault, I mean if I could go I'd go right now." Nancy also noted that her foster care placement was a benefit:

"Yeah (it's a benefit), totally. I mean I don't have to live with him (dad), or I don't have to depend on him. If I want to see him I'll be like 'oh, dad, do you want to hang out, or go watch a movie?' but I'm not going to go home with him; or I'm not going to be there when he gets mad or when he drinks or stuff."

After all of her paperwork was signed she stated she never received a copy. She was only told by her social worker that she was done. At this point she had already graduated from the one high school she attended for four years and was enrolled in a community college program.

Nancy described her transition from her foster home to living on her own as "fun" because she did not have anyone telling her when to go to bed or ask permission to see her boyfriend. She did note that some of the adulthood "sucks" in that she has to "pay for groceries," "pay for laundry," and "that stuff's hard." She also looked at her new freedom and "independence" as having her future in her own hands. She stated, "since you are free, since you don't have rules, it's not like 'let's party' 'let's do all that.' Your life's in

your own hand, the futures in your own hand. If you wanna get good grades go study and do your homework.”

Nancy noted that her time in care was unlike others in terms of the stories she has heard. She felt that she “had it pretty easy.” She stated, “I hear some stories, like...I went from house to house, or some of the stories are depressing like some of the foster parents don’t care at all.” In her experience she is “glad” her foster parents was “willing to help and be there.” It is from this experience that she felt she learned some things, like “patience” but overall she felt most she had already learned prior to entering care.

Sara

Sara was the final participant in the study. She was an 18 year old African American female, who was an emancipated foster youth. Sara was in foster care for three years. Her story was one of many placements, changes to social workers, and changes to schools. She told her story with near exact dates in some cases. She stated, “they picked me and my little brother up on October 7, 2004 probably around 10:00 or 11:00 in the morning, and we were there up until June 30, 2007.” She described that time as being both good and bad. The reason she gave for this perception was being placed in “6-10 foster homes within three years.” She described the ups and downs of being placed in these different foster homes through her statement, “there are some times that okay this is cool...other times, like if I can’t get out of here I am going to lose it.” She noted that the difference in feeling “depended on the people” and that sometimes she would “just put up with it,” or decide that it was just too much and say “goodbye.”

Her experience, with its highs and lows, was as a result of her attitude. Sara described herself as “the stereotypical asshole.” She stated, “in the beginning it was really

hard and I would say that it was difficult because I was an asshole.” She provided a rich description of her attitude and motivation at the time through the following statement:

If I didn’t want to do something, there wasn’t anything anyone could say because I wouldn’t do it. Plenty of times if I was having a bad day and didn’t want to go to therapy or anger management, and because I was having a bad day, I would not go, and no one is going. I made it pretty difficult for people to be able to do their jobs.

In her experience she often felt those in care “patronized” her and treated her “condescendingly.” Two forms of treatment that she felt “there is no coming back from.” She recognized that when individuals did at times try to help her she “made it difficult for them to help.” Ultimately, she felt that an individual’s personality made the difference in how she chose to treat them.

Sara commented that because of her behavior she was often treated unfairly before individuals had the opportunity to get to know her. She described this experience using her social workers and stated, “I’ve had a couple of social workers who said, ‘I’ve already heard about you and I don’t want to hear anything you have to say.’” Out of this treatment she developed the attitude and philosophy of “playing the game.” She described this as an understanding that “you (the social worker) get paid for this...I know what’s going on...I know the game...I have no problem playing it.” By playing the game she would at times cooperate and other times choose her own path. Again all of this was dependent on the individual.

Sara’s three years were not only filled with different home placements but also school placements. She attended six different schools over a three-year period. Her last

three schools were continuation schools, which she credited with helping her to graduate on time because they “give me a packet and the books and I’ll do it.” Her education experience was similar to her foster home experience in that she felt “I’m going to do this my way, regardless of whether you’re a teacher or not.” She also noted that she was able to work at her own pace for 2-3 hours a day and “if (she) needed anything (she’d) find someone to help (her) with it.”

In terms of emancipation she saw it as “being responsible for you.” She commented, “most people think emancipation is you’re free now...” for her it was the acknowledgement that “you are responsible for you now.” Out of this philosophy she, unlike the other two participants, did not complete her paperwork or go to court. She in fact turned 18, packed her things, and moved in with a friend. Her foster mother called the social worker that asked her to come in and complete her paperwork. Sara refused stating, “this was their problem, not mine...they put me in this situation so they can fix it.” She noted that she did receive \$300 from her foster mother and was dropped off.

The transition after her emancipation had its ups and downs as well in that she lived with two sets of friends during this time. The first friend she had to move from because her friend’s mother was having problems with her daughter and her daughter’s boyfriend. Sara stated, “my friend’s mom didn’t like her boyfriend...I told her I’m not going to stand in the middle of it...her mom wasn’t really okay with that because I had just turned 18 and my friend was still a minor and her boyfriend was 18...her mom didn’t want either of us around her daughter anymore.” Out of this situation she moved with another friend. Sara did not state why she moved from the second friend’s home. She

only stated, “I thought if I didn’t move out, it would mess up our friendship...well...it still messed up our friendship.”

Throughout all of these changes Sara located a job at a Target store, enrolled in college, and was living in an apartment as a member of the INSPIRE program. She noted that emancipation and being in care “are not really a big change for her.” She stated that after a while being emancipated “just settled in” and she said, “alright...this is what I need to do...this is what needs to be done...that’s just the way it is.” Her first day emancipated she reflected on going out to “buy a new bathing suit...hang out with friends...then a guy.” She noted that everyone thought she went “buck wild” for a time, but she disagreed with this assertion from others because she viewed herself as always being this way. Nothing she had done was out of the ordinary for her. However, she decided to change this pattern. She had acknowledged that she “definitely went on a ride.” However, after she was done she said, “I’ve done my crazy stuff, and now I’m done.”

EXPLORATORY LEVEL/ INITIAL PERCEPTIONS

Constant Comparative Method Analysis of All Participants

Each participant session was illustrated with constant comparative method analysis utilized to identify comparisons or points of contrast between all participants. There were several meetings with participants; however three meetings were highlighted as others were used to confirm data and the accuracy of my interpretations and perceptions. All sessions utilized open-ended interviews to collect data (Green, Camili, & Elmore, 2006). Each participant was asked her perceptions as well as her opinions of the experience of being a foster youth. The sessions were conducted in a location chosen by

each participant. Interviews were recorded of each participants choosing using an MP3 recording device for record keeping and later transcription.

Session One. The first session served as an exploratory session, allowing me the opportunity as the researcher to learn more about each participant. The goal was to gather their perception(s) as related to their transition to adulthood and preparation for such transition, while in foster care.

The session for Erika, was held on March 26th at 4:30 pm at a near by Carl's Jr. Erika selected this location because of its proximity to her community college. Nancy chose to meet at the INSPIRE home where she and three other INSPIRE members share an apartment. This meeting took place on March 26th at 6:00 pm. Sara and I also met at the INSPIRE home and the interview was conducted on March 28th at 5:30 pm. As a point of clarification I knew each participant was part of INSPIRE but did not know that they had each been roommates. I discovered this detail with each interview.

Initial Preliminary

I used preliminary questions to obtain background information during the first interview. Participants were asked, "How long they were in foster care." As a follow-up to this question the participants were asked to describe their perceptions of being in foster care. Each responded in a similar fashion that placement was okay or that the experience involved both good and bad. The participants then described what they meant by okay, good, and bad; for example, Erika acknowledged having some difficulty with regard to language in that her first foster parents only spoke Spanish and while she was bilingual she was not fluent enough to articulate herself, as she was able to in English. Nancy and

Sara had similar experiences with each other in that they were provided choices by their foster parents and had to either “put up with it” or choose to no longer be in their care.

An additional preliminary question asked the participants how many schools they attended when in care to which Sara had the greatest number with six different schools over her three-year period in care. The other two participants shared only one school change in their time in care. A follow-up question was asked about whether they graduated on time, and each participant stated they had in fact graduated on time. Erika and Sara attended continuation high schools to complete credits in a timely fashion. Nancy graduated from a traditional high school.

Questions underlying the overarching research question

After I asked the preliminary questions, I began asking participants to respond to the questions underlying the overarching research question. We began with questions, which served to identify factual information regarding a topic. As such participants were asked about terms relevant to this research and notions of self-advocacy.

What is the understanding of the participants related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy? The first question asked for each participant to define maturity. Overwhelmingly, each spoke of maturity as being synonymous with responsibility, not age. Sara stated that anyone who thinks maturity is an age is “full of shit.” Responsibility was described in terms of actions responding to situations encountered. Sara described responsibility in terms of doing the “have to’s” before doing the “want to’s.” She stated maturity is understanding the difference between these two in that “you have to do the ‘have to’s,’ the ‘want to’s’ are up to you.” She also stated that “if you don’t like the have to’s, find some different have to’s for yourself.” All participants indicated the need to

address responsibilities one is obligated to perform and other things that one would like to perform.

Secondly, they were asked to define emancipation and what it represented for them. Again, for each participant, emancipation was synonymous with responsibility. Erika commented that “they’re old enough to understand that I’m this age now and I can take care of myself;” Nancy stated, “...(its) when they let you go...be on your own...not be in foster care anymore...you don’t have this part of them anymore...or the government;” Sara pointed to the notion of freedom and that emancipation does not equate with freedom, but responsibility for self in that, “I just have to take care of myself now.”

The participants were asked to define two final terms educational justice and self-advocacy. Erika and Nancy did not have a definition for educational justice. Sara indicated that she had not ever thought about it, but acknowledged that there have been some kids the school system has truly failed. She stated, “we’re supposed to have the best schools in the world...Kids need to read: signs...restaurants...bathrooms...you know...everyone has to work together to make it right. The teachers, the parents, school district, the kids...everyone. That’s the only way to make it right.” In this context Sara defined educational injustice in terms of a system that fails foster youth in its education preparedness. She analyzed American education and compared it with the education one may attain in another country and acknowledged that many find American education to be the best. She pointed out that while the perception was that we have the best education, foster youth were not the beneficiaries of this system. Her example was that

some students left school unable to read. It was an acknowledgement that somewhere along the way the education system has failed foster youth.

In terms of self-advocacy both Nancy and Sara discussed notions of support as being advocacy. This support was translated, for these participants, as standing up for their rights. Participants were asked the following clarifying question: Who helped or advocated for you as you were growing up? Erika and Nancy commented about school personnel who supported them. Although Erika did not have a definition for advocacy she did state she had a teacher “give her the courage and motivation to complete school and continue her education.” Nancy had a similar experience with school personnel and family in that her older brother and a secretary from her high school encouraged her to keep going and not give up. In fact she considered the secretary like a “big sister” in that, “basically, if I needed help with anything, she would say ‘I could help you with this or I could help you with that.’” She stated that what she learned from these individuals was the notion that “what is done is done” and “you can only make it better.” These were two very important points of how she was supported by her advocates.

Sara had a different take on support from advocates because she saw herself as somewhat responsible for her own lack of support through, by her own admission, being “an asshole.” An interesting point of contrast with the other two participants was the fact that Sara acknowledged that people did try to help her and support her along the way, but because of her own attitude she was not accepting of the support, yet her behavior indicated she was acting as a self-advocate in that she still learned these skills. Though her journey was different than the other two in this regard she indicated that she got along with two of the seven social workers she had over the course of her time in care. She

recognized that there were individuals who were willing to help and serve as advocates, while at the same time there were those who say, “I know you’re an asshole so I’m not even going to bother.” Sara learned from all these individuals a collective lesson that, “you catch more flies with honey than vinegar.” She understood that being kind to people was important but poked fun at the statement by acting as if she had interpreted it literally saying: “Why would anyone want flies around?” She acknowledged “...there are so many people I’ve been an ass to, and if I was nice to them, maybe for like two days, maybe some stuff would have gotten done.” There was a recognizing of the presence of advocacy and support from others though she did not always choose to accept it, because of her actions and reactions to care.

My questions enabled me to examine and analyze the perception of each participant regarding the concepts of: maturity, emancipation, educational justice, and advocacy. While all participants were not able to answer every question, with clarifying questions included, there is a common thread of responsibility consistent in each of the responses. All participants defined maturity, not in terms of age, but in terms of accepting responsibility. Responsibilities included emancipation, self-advocacy, and recognition of when they were facing educational injustices. They saw the importance of educational justice even when they were not sure of an exact definition of it. This was evident in their comments about being responsible also for others. Responsibility was by someone else, for someone else.

What background or demographic information is shared during the interview?

The purpose of these questions was to identify how the participants related to others in terms of their age of emancipation and how far along they were in their education.

Through each interview there were additional questions specific to the respondent, used to clarify their statements. Each participant emancipated about a month or two after turning 18 years old. A common experience of each participant was that of choosing emancipation as soon as possible. Another common experience was that the process of emancipation was brief and abrupt. Erika described the feeling as, “Congratulations, here you go...Okay...thank you...you just sign the paper and you’re outta here...I think they gave us like \$200 bucks for emancipation to help us out or something.” Respectively, each of the participants shared that the process of emancipation was a matter of completing paperwork and shortly, through pressure, to leave their foster care placement. Nancy described having her “stuff” packed prior to her birthday because her foster parents told her that she would no longer be living there after 18. She noted that they made her feel that she needed to hurry and get out because they were not getting any money for her after her 18th birthday. She reported that she had liked these care providers and that their comment connecting her need to leave because they were no longer receiving money felt hurtful. In both cases the social worker brought the papers to the youth and the youth completed it. For Sara this was not the case. She left her placement and told her social worker that the emancipation was “their problem” not hers, and that “they put her in the situation, so they can fix it.”

In terms of education after emancipation each participant had graduated already with a high school diploma and was enrolled in a college program. Their transition became a point of interest through the interview and the participants were asked to describe their move from foster care to emancipation. Sara had the most movement in her transition in that she initially moved with a friend but had to move because of an

argument with the parent of the home. She then moved in with another friend, whose parent was not home much, but she left after an argument with her friend. As a result she was on the move again after a few months. Her final move was to the INSPIRE program. Erika and Nancy transitioned from their foster home to the INSPIRE house. None of the individuals went back home to their birth parents.

In order to clarify I asked why these participants did not want to return home. They were each asked about their relationship with their birth parents since they were emancipated. The thread that was consistent in all of the responses was the notion that their relationships with their birth parents have all been works in progress. Each participant, because of her own maturity, pointed to areas of improvement in her relationships with her parents and ascribed this to parents' participation in therapy and counseling services. Both Nancy and Sara noted that they "hang-out" with their parents from time to time going to lunch or a movie, though both indicated that after a while they were ready to leave. These youth gave an impression that they were working on their relationship with their parents and that this process was a slow process. Erika viewed it as seeing her parents as "people on their own, and (she) on her own." There was also the common theme expressed in the belief that entering foster care was an experience whereby one "kind of stopped having parents" (Erika). This led them to view their parents differently. The parents were not viewed as authority figures over the lives of the participants. The relationship between each participant and her parent or parents was one where they saw each other but not in a child and parent context. It was a relationship that allows them to transition into their own adulthood, where they want to still have a relationship, even if it was not typical.

As a transition point, we discussed the INSPIRE program and how it has helped them. Each participant commented that they do not know what they would have done without the program. INSPIRE for each of them was “options” and “opportunity” to do things they always wanted to do but did not have support on their own to accomplish. All of the participants in the program were required to attend school, counseling, Life Skills classes, and pay \$100 in rent and 10% utilities. Erika viewed this as a turning point in her life that she “hope(s) stays around.” Nancy felt mixed emotions in that she felt free because her decisions were her own to make (i.e. staying at her boyfriends home), but the responsibility of her own decisions (i.e. having to purchase groceries) is some time confining. She describes it as being hard, but liking to be on her own, “it’s a sense of maturity...independence.”

To summarize, each was emancipated when they turned 18 and had graduated. It was not a requirement to graduate before one can be emancipated. However, given the number of youth who are in foster care that do not graduate on time, it was important to note that in the cases of these three that they each was able to accomplish this goal. They also shared the experience of being left out on their own with no knowledge of where to go and what to do once they left care. For each of these participants birth parents were not an option as far as a living situation, but they were willing to work on an adult relationship with their parents. There was a thread of acknowledgement that although these things occurred it should not stop the youth from having a different relationship in the future. An additional thread that was found was the notion that each of these individuals needed the support of some other (person, system, group, etc.) in their transition after emancipation. This support came in the form of friends or programming.

Regardless, to the support all of them needed it in order to transition. Through their support they have learned the mixed feelings that come with adulthood: being free to make ones own decision and being responsible for those decisions.

How do the participants describe their experiences in sensory terms (i.e., what they said, felt, heard, smelled, touched) regarding the phenomenon of self-advocacy?

These questions were designed to identify perceptions of the individuals through the senses; the objective was to get the participants to describe their situation in such a way so that another person would feel as if he/she could understand. The focus of the questions related to the first day that individuals were no longer in care, and what that experience looked, felt, sounded, and smelled like. Erika and Nancy described it as “reality...like that was it.” They discussed the feelings of needing to find a place to live, a job, and other important life decisions. Nancy described it as,

I felt a little like I’m not going to be living here anymore...but it’s already my home. And that’s the only home I lived in that I was at. They were really nice, but not caring. It just sucks because you’re going to be on your own, and I hadn’t been going to move back with my dad or anywhere else. I just wanted to live on my own. I felt like an adult...Reality...Not so fresh and so clean...I mean I just knew I was out...I knew I was done.”

Here Nancy has described a sense of completion while also having posed questions regarding what to do next. While Nancy did not seem to possess a sense of what to do without support, Sara reported that, having not had a lot of support, “didn’t feel any different.” She felt her transition took place years before her status as emancipated became legal. She stated that she never wanted anyone to ever “put her in a cage.” In fact

she commented that she “would be damned if someone put her in a cage and told her she could not do something.” She admitted to the same feelings as the other two in that she was uncertain about “what to do now.” She also acknowledged that the reality of the situation had not set in for a while and the fact that she is now her own responsibility. As a result her first day out she noted that she “went and bought a bathing suit...hung out with friends...and then a guy.” She was reluctant to provide detail but did state that this was a period when others described her as going through her “buck-wild” stage. She made a choice to change as seen in the following statement: “I’ve done my crazy stuff, and now I’m done” and began to get things together in terms of finding employment and a place to live.

The common thread here with all the individuals was a duplicity similar to that addressed in the previous questions in that there was a feeling of freedom and an uncertainty of ones future. Again without the support systems that others may have through their growth process adult transition was difficult. The notion that you were your own responsibility was difficult to imagine for these participants because they had no idea where they were going to go, only that they wanted to go.

What feelings or emotions possibly are expressed in the sharing of the participants’ experiences of being former foster youth and their preparation for self-advocacy? These questions were designed to investigate and understand the emotional responses of these participants as viewed through the lens of their experiences and thoughts. The first question explored notions of self-advocacy and asks the participants their feeling on supporting their future to which everyone acknowledged their ability to support their future. Consciously, each response recognized the difficulty of being one’s

own supporter but they all were reflections of past experiences, which gave them a sense of confidence and encouragement to have future success. Erika pointed to the fact that she completed high school, and as a result knew she “could do anything else after that.” Nancy illustrated a mental aptitude that she has never let anything hold her back from what she wanted to do. She also commented, “your life is in your own hand...you can’t rely on anybody else...if you want it your going to have to do what you have to, to get it.” Sara spoke about the notion of potential. She stated, “as long as I use my potential the right way...I’ll make good choices...and be fine.” In each of the cases there is the mind of one that has survived through difficulty and can continue to survive so long as she uses her choices and potential situationally appropriate.

Secondly, participants were asked to respond to questions relating to being their own advocate, as opposed to those who served as their advocate in care. The purpose here was to go deeper into notions of self-advocacy and whether participants could in fact advocate their own needs. Erika and Nancy both acknowledged that they were getting there but were not completely there. For Erika she admitted to being $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way because of her completion of her cosmetology license. She felt this has given her skills to put her plan into motion. She also mentioned “networking” as being an important skill empowering her own self of self-advocacy. She stated, “I didn’t know what the heck networking was when I was in foster care.” She has looked to these skills to assist her in being a self-advocate and “avoiding statistics girls in her situation fall into.” She illustrated this point in response to the Latina girls becoming pregnant and not participating in post-secondary education:

‘not a lot of Latino girls make it to college, or universities, most of them get pregnant...’(and) I didn’t want to be one of them...one of those Latinos. I want to show a difference...for other foster kids like me, or for other Latino girls who get boyfriends and get pregnant. If I can do this (they) can do it too... You just have to stay away from the crowd... You’ll be fine and that’s what I’m doing.

Nancy has similar notions in that she has believed she is mentally prepared to serve as a self-advocate, but has understood some of the physical restraints to her achieving this goal. For example, she stated that her rent was only \$113 and she has received half of it from her uncle because she currently was unemployed. She has understood that she cannot rely on others to take care of her and needs to position herself to take care of herself in a greater fashion. As a follow-up question she was asked when she felt she would be able to serve as her own advocate. She responded, “give me three years to get my degree in nursing...I mean I think by that time.”

In both cases for Erika and Nancy the individuals had a positive outlook on advocating their own needs. They recognized areas where they needed assistance from others but displayed a plan for how they would go about being their own advocate. In terms of Sara she already felt she was serving as her own advocate since very young because she was “a very proud person.” She stated, “for me to ask for help, people know that I obviously need help if I’m asking for it...you can’t just sit there...it is completely up to you.” She has an understanding that nothing was handed to anyone, “you have to work for what you have...and if you don’t work you don’t deserve it.”

In all of the cases each participant was able to identify areas in their life where she felt she served as her own advocate. Erika found this by completing her license and

networking with individuals. Nancy identified areas such as going to the hospital in search of relief from her tendency to get migraine headaches, going to the grocery store with a checklist, and keeping a budget. She commented, “I do have a budget...(if) a shirt is only \$12 bucks I’ll get it...unlike some kids who can just spend money...I have to make sure.” Sara has identified her advocacy in actions of working and going to school. She stated, “I’m choosing to go to school and choosing every day to get up and go to work even on the days I’m having a migraine and I don’t want to deal with 500 people...I still do it...There are times I don’t want to, but I do it...No one else will take care of me, so I do it.” In each of the cases there was an assertion that while they were not fully prepared to advocate for all their needs, they understand that they mentally are able. Each communicated a resilient determination to learn from past difficulties and transform this learning so as to use it in pursuing future success.

What are the descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy? These questions explored participants’ experiences and activities related to their experiences in acting as self-advocates. The participants were asked questions about what life was like as an emancipated foster youth specifically related to the activities they participate in. The idea was to go beyond the level of emotional reactivity to a more cognitive understanding of their day-to-day activities. It also explored description of the changes and/or adaptations to their behavior after emancipation. An important common thread throughout all the responses to this question was accountability for one’s self. Erika described a number of activities from dancing, to exercising, to working and going to school, all of which “just make myself successful.” She has held an understanding that this was her life and she must be

“positive...positive...positive.” Sara had a similar acceptance of self in that the activities she described were mainly “spending a lot of time on the bus.” She stated,

I work and go to school in San Bernardino (but live in Riverside). I leave here Monday through Thursday at 6:50 in the morning...get on the bus at 6:55, arrive at school at 8:30 am...I have school till 12:15...(then) I’m at a friend’s house because I don’t get off work till 10:30-11:00 at night and my last bus leaves my work at 8pm the last bust to Riverside leaves at 10 pm and my last bus downtown Riverside leaves here at 9, so none of them meet up...All the time on the bus is doing homework or trying to catch some extra sleep...When I get my school and work switched out here I’ll probably have about five extra hours a day...Maybe then I’ll find other things to do.

Her experience as an emancipated foster youth led her to self-efficacy in being successful in navigating through a transit system between two counties. Her experience was not unlike Nancy who stated, “it depends on me.” While Nancy claimed she was a self-advocate, she countered the claim after experiencing emancipation when she stated: “where’d all my support go? ...where did this go...you have to understand you can’t depend on nobody else anymore...it’s you that’s going to take care of you.” She demonstrated self-direction, however, when she formed a study group that has met at her home weekly where the group prepared for tests and completed homework. She indicated experiencing a lack of a social life because “if you’re going to college, you need to know that it’s not going to be all fun and games...it’s not high school.” Other actions included being in charge of her own appointments, getting up in the morning to go to school, completing homework and other tasks that typically she had relied on an adult doing for

her. She ended her statement by saying, “you just have to realize you’re on your own...it has its downfalls.”

Interestingly, each of the participants described their experience as an emancipated foster youth in terms of behaviors and actions. They understood their adaptations and changes as they transitioned from home placements in foster care to experiences after leaving them because of emancipation. Each of them conveyed has a sense of self-responsibility in that they understand that no one owes them anything and that what they do with their lives is completely up to them. While they have acknowledged that they continue to need support in one fashion or another they were forward thinking in that they have a plan as to how they might become a help in the future verses forever being helped. They have adapted to their “freedom” as some have termed it with responsibility and ownership for their future.

What opinions, intentions, goals, desires, and values are described related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy? The final set of questions explored the participants’ perceptions at the level of individual value. This series of questions worked to discover what these individuals thought. Goals were explored, intentions, and values as they related to time in foster care, preparation for adulthood and the potential benefit of lessons learned while in care. In terms of these questions I asked each participant what they thought about their time in care and I received three different answers. Erika stated, “it taught me a lot;” Nancy stated, “I think I had it pretty easy;” and Sara stated, “I could have used it more wisely...definitely.” Each responded based on their time and experience with the foster system.

Nancy commented that her time was easy because:

I hear some stories, like oh, I went from house to house, or some stories are depressing like some of the foster parents don't care at all. I was just glad that I actually had parents that actually...they didn't care, but they were like willing to help and willing to be there...In that way, I feel like he (the foster dad) actually helped me in some ways...It was short...At first when I got in I thought, oh, god...I'm gonna be in here forever. My 18th birthday couldn't come soon enough. That's how I felt, but day by day, even in high school, doing all the activities, made it go so quick, like I thought I'd be there forever, but it went by quick.

This response of her time being somewhat easy was a result of spending a short time in care and of being placed in only one home. The addition of senior year activities made her time proceed much faster than she originally expected. As a result it appeared that she viewed her time in care in a different light than someone who was in for a longer time period or with multiple foster parents.

Erika viewed her time in foster care as being one in which she learned a lot. She spent a longer time in care and was moved to two different homes. She stated that she learned a lot because her guardian made her "feel like she was someone worth being taking care of..." This statement seems to imply that she benefited from someone caring for her. Her relationship with her past foster family grew to such an extent that she commented she wanted to be adopted before she turned 18. She stated:

...I always wanted to have a relationship with my parents, so when I was in foster care, it was a perfect opportunity to get close with someone and you can never be close enough, unless they wanted to adopt you ...but that was not the case at all.

So, in a way, I feel bad because I kind of wanted to be adopted before I was 18, but I guess I didn't feel special enough...

The time she spent with her foster family seemed to teach her to care for others though that care may not have been reciprocated as it was given to others. She discussed the notion of learning in this sense as being "kind of sad." She stated,

Once you start learning, like the foster care agencies and the system and how it works, that they get paid to have you and they're supposed to give you some allowance and all this and that then like it starts to make you wonder are they doing this because they want to help kids and raise them and teach them good things and tell them you got to stay in school or do you think that they have their own kids and it's easy, you know, just tell them the basic rules, and then you know, get paid for it so they have a living...that's how it made me feel.

While her time in care was a learning experience she may not have experienced what she expected.

Sara discussed how her struggles in foster care contributed to her personal growth. She recognized where her personality and personal decisions may have effected how she was perceived and received in care. She commented:

I was the one who knew what buttons to press with every person and how to press him or her. I knew when I was going to do something wrong. I would call my social workers ahead of time and let them know so that when they called and tried to get me trouble, (they would say) she already called and told me...I was not receptive to going to school...If I didn't want to eat something for dinner, I wouldn't eat it...I was the fire starter...I felt like they needed this job...We're

kind of in charge...I know I've caused people to get fired or quit...I know I did that. If I used that time better and used that time productive, I could have gotten some things done.

Her careful reflection was almost like an older wiser person looking back on ones life and realizing some of the areas where they could have improved to make things better. Her comments never came across as regretful in any fashion, just reflective that her time could were better spent. She spent more time in care than the other three, which may have lead her to look at her time in a different fashion than the others. She had more experience with social workers, foster parents, and group homes. As a result Sara, like Erika, learned, possibly as a means of protection, that if you give love it may not be returned. It was the belief that individuals may disappoint you if you have too much expectation of them. Therefore, if her expectation was low and her participation in the relationship minimal she may reduce the hurt of not being loved.

When participants were asked about their preparation to become self-advocates for adulthood each individual commented that in some ways the experience did help them. For Nancy she stated that overall she was an adult because of some of the roles she had to fulfill in her home prior to entering care (i.e. being the mom for her brothers and sisters). The other two participants mentioned that they learned transferable skills in care, such as budgeting and saving money, paying bills, and preparing for what is ahead. They also mentioned the fact that they learned "no one has to do a damn thing for you" (Sara); an important lesson for all of these youth in that they understood that they are their own to care for at this point. It appears that each individual valued her time in care for making them "stronger." Nancy reflected where her foster parents made her do things

on her own because she was older and they wanted to prepare her. None of the individuals stated that they would have chosen to be in foster care to learn these lessons, but since they were they would learn something from it.

Lastly, I asked simply what do you value. Erika valued her independence and control for her life. She stated simply, “I just want to be a good person.” Erika also mentioned that she valued herself, God, and her supporters. Sara valued integrity as a person and principles. She stated that she has always valued principles and the character of a person.

A common thread throughout each of the value statements as the participants continued was family even though for some “they’re not there or they really don’t care” (Nancy). Sara stated:

I think a lot of foster kids value family, but they value it in a different way...I want to put my family back together...not just for me...for my brothers and sisters, my nephews and whatever impending children I have...I do want there to be a strong family background...I want to be behind them. I don’t feel like I have anybody behind me...there for me. That’s something that matters to me a lot.

Through each of these questions participants were able to produce descriptions of their experience in care. While this experience is varied it does share the common thread of being accountable for ones self, a juxtaposition of freedom and responsibility to the changes in their lives, and coming to a sense of values that drive their future self-advocacy.

In terms of the questions underlying the overarching research question and semi-structured interview questions the youth share multiple common threads. These threads

present data of similarity between the three and has allowed one to view the perceptions of these youth as related to these questions and more specifically, as related to their emancipation and preparation to act as self-advocates.

Semi-structured interview questions

Session Two. The semi-structured interview questions associated with self-advocacy were used to gain a deeper understanding into the perceptions of emancipated foster youth serving as self-advocates. In like manner many of the questions were used as a means to check data previously gleaned from the first session. The purpose of checking for understanding in this way was to make sure the perceptions of these youth was being accurately depicted. During this meeting the youth were told about the importance of self-advocates taking on personal responsibility for ones future. There was also information shared with respect to self-advocates being proactive in their planning, focusing on solutions and strengths of a situation as opposed to reasons why something cannot be accomplished. Out of these discussions participants were asked to explore the importance of the following factors in terms of their preparation to transition to adulthood:

- Setting goals, short term and long term
- Research—finding facts and relevant information
- Analyzing facts and information
- Understanding and analyzing the goals of the “other side”
- Connecting personal goals with others’ goals
- Identifying allies and supporters
- Analyzing situations critically

- Identifying one's own strengths and weaknesses
- Planning strategy
- Planning written and oral presentations
- Dealing with setbacks and rejection
- Building on successes
- Reviewing and adjusting goals and strategies

The points addressed above will be further detailed with respect to each of the participants and will provide a deeper understanding of each perspective. Similarly, the information presented will be analyzed for common themes and or threads throughout the responses. They will not be presented in the structural order that they are displayed, as some of the questions have common themes that carry over and are better served grouped with other points.

Goal Setting--What are your thoughts regarding your ability to pursue and attain your goals?

Goal setting is foundational to self-advocacy; and considers long and short-term planning. Participants were asked to describe situations in their life where they have set goals. All of the participants set goals for both education and personally. Erika's education goals were to complete her degree and get a booth as a hair stylist. She was interested personally in getting married. Nancy has a similar set of goals in that she was looking to complete her degree and become a prenatal nurse. Personally she, humorously, commented, "I want to take care of babies then make babies." Sara has a short-term education goal to transfer to UCR (University California Riverside) and earn a degree in

sociology. She would like to work as a relocation social worker or a life coach.

Personally, she too would like to have a family.

An interesting thread common to all three participants was the fact that each wants to complete their education and have a family. While the events in their lives were difficult it has not changed them from wanting to start their own families. Importantly, with respect to educational justice was the notion that they want to continue their education. It was a goal they have for the short and long term to see their undergraduate work completed. As self-advocates they have taken a view that through their goals they can alter their future. This may be with regard to education or their personal lives.

How an individual plans to reach their goals is just as important as the goal itself. This relates to the strategies or techniques one may use to reach a goal or plan. In like manner developing strategies to work through goals or reassess them at times was vital for effective self-advocacy. The process of review allows one to create strategies in the event that the events do not follow the plan. In terms of a planning strategy Erika plans out decisions. She does not like to just go with the flow. As such she keeps a Day minder, creates task lists for the week, evaluates pros and cons, and talks to herself through “what if” statements. Her lists of strategies were methodical in that she takes consideration not only for the plan but the ways it may need to be adjusted. In a sense she covers all the angles. She described this as being able to “assess, adapt, and overcome.”

Nancy has used a similar strategy where she also plans things out with lists, evaluates pros and cons, and utilizes self-talk. Her term for her process is “lockdown.” She stated that she keeps herself on lockdown when she needs to get something done. When she plans these goals it was during her “lockdown” period that she develops plans

and reassess any current plans if needed to improve and create better avenues of success. Finally, Sara was the same in that she too is as she states, “analytical.” She comments that she must plan from A-Z and humorously stated, “...if aliens take over Starbucks I need to know where I want to have lunch.” Each of the participants takes time to plan thorough similar strategies and modify plans if needed. All of which are again important in adulthood and as they transition to adulthood.

Research—finding facts and relevant information/ Analyzing facts and information/ Analyzing situations critically--What changes and/or adaptations occurred in your life as you transitioned from foster care to emancipation? What were your experiences of being prepared to take responsibility for your own life once you were emancipated from foster care? What are the responsibilities you encountered and continue to handle as a result of emancipation?

As self-advocates one must be able to research information and identify relevancy in the facts or data collected. It is a notion that situations must be looked at critically to reach ones expected end. For these participants they have analyzed a great deal, for example: looking at one self and the responsibility that comes with being emancipated. Nancy put it best when she stated, “you don’t have them (the government) any more.” In checking for understanding from past statements, each of the participants recognized that they do not have their government parent any longer and must research facts and relevant information for the purpose of survival. As such they have researched jobs, rental agreements, college applications and financial aid, doctor and dentist visits, grocery shopping, and a myriad of other important pieces of information they must become knowledgeable about as they transition.

They also acknowledged a critical outlook as related to their families. Each of the participants still has remained in communication with their families both in conversation and in person. Each may be quoted as saying they have been “Working” on their relationship with their birth parents. Each youth held a critical perspective where she understood her position as an adult and likewise their parent’s position as adults. It was a view that a new relationship may be formed different from a parent-child relationship to and adult-adult relationship. For much of their lives the relationship these youth tried to facilitate was a parent-child relationship where roles were defined as a hierarchy or dominant power relation. In this sense the parent would typically hold the position of power and the child would be subordinate. As adults the participants work toward a different adult reality of relationship with their birth parents, where the adult-adult relationship was equal for all persons involved. In this relationship each takes focus on the future and deals minimally with the past, the reason being because the past is reminiscent to the power relationship not equality. Youth have a positive outlook in this communication because they understand that as adults they do not have to return home with their parents, where they may be subjected to being subordinate. It allowed them a sense of space that they perceive they need to continue their growth process. Through this critical process these youth take responsibility for their mental and emotional wellbeing and recognize when it is time to go and when it is time to reconnect.

Understanding and analyzing the goals of “the other side”—What changes and/or adaptations occurred in your life as you transitioned from foster care to emancipation?

The concept of “the other side” is an understanding of the system that one must participate in and throughout her or his life. It is used to get youth to view those persons, institutions, groups, etc. that they participate in and the goals this system may hold. In like manner it focuses on the changes and adaptations the youth have encountered as they transitioned from foster care to emancipation. An example of this was Erika who described her friends and the day she realized their goals no longer matched her goals. She stated that this is when she stopped partying and getting into trouble. In understanding and analyzing the other side she recognized her friends as a system with influence both in her present and on her future.

Self-advocacy recognizes one’s system. An individual’s system may consist of groups, individuals, activities etc., that help to shape the person. Understanding and analyzing the goals of the other side is the idea that as self-advocates one must be able to critically analyze his/her system and their goals, as they relate or are contrary to the goals of the self-advocate. Sara experienced this through her current job with Target as related to her work schedule. She asked to change her work schedule to be consistent with her schooling and the bus schedules of two counties (Riverside—where she lives and San Bernardino—where she works and attends school). She was not successful in getting her employer to understand but was working to negotiate a transfer to a store closer to home; at which time she planned to transfer her courses to a college that would be more convenient.

Erika viewed the other side through her systemic history. The history of her system was that she knows and understands where she was in her life and who were her support systems. She was able to see where she came from, what she struggled with, and

how she can achieve her goals. Through this process she was considerate of others needs, while at the same time worked to fulfill her own needs. In like manner, Nancy experienced the other side through her systemic history in her family. She critically looked at her brother and the motivation and support he was to her and the fact that her father has been “doing better” since entering therapy. The aspect of her system that is of importance is family and how family supports or is contrary to ones goals.

Each of the participants viewed a different “other side” depending on her situation, experience, and systemic history. Notably, a common thread through out is the ability for each to “empathize” to some degree with another as related to her system. The importance here is not in whether the individual acts on the empathy but the ability to recognize another’s need while also fulfilling her own. There is a level of understanding and tolerance for a person’s “have to’s” as Sara might describe it. The identification is in this ability to see beyond self and recognize others, out of selflessness, through self-advocacy. One cannot simply focus on self, but must also examine her system and inner-relation with that system to achieve self-advocacy.

Identifying allies and supporters/ Identifying one’s own strengths and weaknesses: What are your thoughts regarding how foster care can prepare youth to live confidently and competently after emancipation?

Self-advocacy relates ones allies and supporters to the process by which an individual will cultivate strengths and develop weaknesses. Often it is through the allies and supporters that one is able to recognize his/her own strengths and/or weaknesses. In this identification they are also able to realize how foster care as a potential supporter could have prepared them for life after emancipation. For each of the participants when

asked about allies and supporters they each mentioned family, friends, and school personnel. Nancy had her brother and a secretary at her former high school, Erika had her boyfriend, family, and counselor, and Sara had her stepmother and cousin. It is important to note that even through this difficult time these individuals were able to identify people in their lives who they feel have the youth's interest at heart.

It was these individuals that helped the participants identify strengths. For each of them a key strength and preparation beyond emancipation is their self-responsibility. It is their ability to continue toward their goals and aspirations. It is their tenacity to face their reality and change it as they see fit despite what statistics may detail or plan for their future. Sara states it as her ability to "do and have all she wants" in life. Through this process the participants are also able to think critically in that they recognize areas where they need to improve. Sara at times finds herself to be "cruel, cold, and unrelenting." Nancy feels she "works too hard," and Erika feels she "could work harder." Interestingly, each participant does not view a weakness as a set back. They take their weak points as areas of future improvement. Each is thinking positively to the point that they believe they can do all they set their mind toward. They recognize that while things are difficult they are not permanent, and as such they are alterable.

Dealing with setbacks and rejection/ Building on successes--What do you think about your time in foster care in terms of learning or not learning what you would need to be able to do once you were emancipated?

Growing up teaches one to deal with setbacks and rejections. The growth process also provides lessons on how to build on success. For foster youth sometime the lessons of set back and rejection are far too frequent and building on success infrequent.

Understanding how to both cultivate success and manage rejection is key to the self-advocate as she/he must and surely will encounter both. In terms of set backs each of the youth provided an academic example as they work through their undergraduate work. Erika described an appointment she missed with her counselor, which later caused her to miss an important course for her major. Nancy described her acceptance to CBU but not being able to attend for financial reasons. Sara described applying for San Diego State University and not being accepted. Through these experiences participants developed resilience, learned while in care, in that with each set back none of them shared that they had given up; they all found a way to achieve their objective. Erika added the class later and both Nancy and Sara planned to transfer once they completed their General Education requirements.

It is through these setbacks and rejections that the participants build on their successes. Their willingness to not give in when faced with difficulty allows them to view their past success and see areas where they can continue for the future. Both Nancy and Erika attributed this to a relationship with God. Nancy stated, "...without God none of this would be possible." The strategy that goes into recognizing an area of success and identifying what made that work, then continuing that process is the reason these individuals are further along than some of the other emancipated foster youth. It is in their ability to serve as self-advocates first in the belief that "I can do all that I set my mind to do," as indicated by all youth, that allows these individuals to see success in various points of their lives. It does not mean that they do not have set backs, but when faced with difficulty they rise to the occasion.

Session Three. The final session was used as data checking to confirm participant statements and conclusions I developed using their stories and statements and current literature. Through these sessions I found, self-advocacy focuses on an individuals' ability to support his/herself in various capacities. The notion of self-advocacy is not to say that one is "self sufficient" at the point of emancipation, but rather it is a mindset, a paradigm shift, from a concept of being supported by others to being self-responsible (Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005, p. 76). The youth in this study were able to shift from being supported to being self-responsible. In short they understand, for themselves, what it takes to become a successful adult.

Chung, Little, and Steinberg (2005) in writing about "What it takes to become a successful adult" stated, the capacity for one to successfully transition from adolescence to adulthood is through psychosocial maturity (p. 76). The concept of psychosocial maturity is where one is fully aware of his/her relationship with their environment, be that physically, socially, or emotionally (Chung, Little, & Steinberg, 2005, p. 76; Osgood et. al., 2005). Through their psychosocial maturity these participants are each able to recognize their relationship with their environment and advocate their needs. An example of this is with regard to their ability to identify strengths and weaknesses. In being able to understand one self intrinsically these youth practice self-advocacy at a level where they are able to support their goals as the most reliable person in their lives.

Table 2 displays a summary of the common threads across the participants.

Table 2: Common threads across each of the participants

Types of Questions/ Questions	Common Threads
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What are the descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?	Being self-accountable Juxtaposition of freedom and responsibility as an adaptation to the changes in their lives. Values—independence, self, God, Family
What opinions, intentions, goals, desires, and values are described related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?	Reflective Learning
What feelings or emotions possibly are expressed in the sharing of the participants’ experiences of being former foster youth and their preparation for self-advocacy?	Reflection of past action and difficulty to create future successes/ The notion of potential and choice. Resilient determination
What are the understanding of the participants related to the phenomenon of self-advocacy?	Responsibility—surroundings, self, actions, & others
How do the participants describe their experiences in sensory terms (i.e., what they said, felt, heard, smelled, touched) regarding the phenomenon of self-advocacy?	Duplicity of Freedom and Responsibility
What background or demographic information are shared during the interview?	Acknowledgement, Support, Responsibility

These common threads are an indication that self-advocacy supports the notion that foster youth if taught these skills will be able to better support themselves to change their future reality (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). In the case of these three youth they learned these concepts not directly, as in a course or ILP workshop, but through their lived experience. This is consistent with Krebs and Pitcoff (2006) in that “most successful people learn self-advocacy in their home environment, schools, or workplaces” (p. 132). The three participants all learned self-advocacy through their systems and experiences, though it was not directly taught to them.

In checking for understanding and misconceptions it is understood that this is not

Self-Advocacy Components	Youth showed ability to...
Focused on future realities	Focus on future realities.

an indication that these individuals are in some way perfect and do not need support to see “models of a succeeding world” (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 123). In like manner it reiterates the statement by Osgood (2005) that transition to adulthood for “vulnerable populations” requires “considerable assistance” (p.11). The data acknowledges that the three participants in this study have the skill to advocate for themselves (Table 3).

Personally responsible for ones future	Be personally responsible for hare/her future.
Forward Planning	Forward plan
Sets goals	Set goals.
Research facts	Research facts.
Analyzes facts/ information	Analyze facts/ information
Understands/ Analyzes goals of others	Analyze goals of others
Connects personal goals w/ others goals	Connect personal goals w/ others goals
Identifies allies/ supporters	Identify allies/ supporters
Analyzes situations critically	Analyze situations critically
Identifies own strengths/ weaknesses	Identify own strengths/ weakness
Deals w/ set backs/ rejections	Deal w/ set backs or rejection
Builds on successes	Build on successes
Reviews/ adjusts goals/ strategies	Review/ adjust goals/ strategies

Table 3: Common Threads between Participants

It also acknowledges that for these participants while they may not know everything they have the ability to research answers, create plans, revise plans, analyze situations, build successes, and manage setbacks. In practicing self-advocacy through the ability to research answers, etc. these participating youth help to reduce the risk as they enter adulthood for problem behaviors, incarceration, depression, lower self-esteem, and poor social relationships (Children, Families, and Foster Care, 2008; Farruggia et. al, 2006).

The three participants demonstrated this by graduating high school on time, enrolling in a college, and maintaining an apartment. Their self-advocacy allows them the opportunity to become participating citizens, as YOC (2001) points out is vital for foster youth.

The significance of my study illustrates the idea that it is out of their lived experience that they have learned to work toward the future of a changeable reality. These three participants have learned the 12 components or skills that are necessary for effective self-advocacy; for example, they have learned personal responsibility as related to self and others. Within that concept is the notion of autonomous judgments where they are able to make their own decisions. As self-advocates the three participants recognize the system with which they work and have gained self-knowledge to balance their needs, goals, and aspirations with another. They similarly, recognize their marginalization as foster youth and the fact that many do not complete their education because of both education and social systemic factors that foster youth face; but are able to work through the technical and adaptive problems in their lives as they pursue voice through choice. Finally, these participants are resilient in that they do not view set backs as finalities, but rather inconveniences that they must find a different way around.

Self-advocacy for foster youth is an inner belief in ones ability to serve her or his own need (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). As a concept it recognizes the need for the system, as do foster youth. The perception of these youth is that while they recognize the need to still have support from their system that support must change to teach self-advocacy. As pointed out in the review of literature much of care is about control, not self-advocacy. These three participants illustrate these control ideas. Sara, perhaps best, through her experiences with social workers wanting to control her behavior prior to her participating

in any misbehavior. Self-advocacy allows these youth to change past power relations through education, which is “generally viewed as a key factor in predicting adult self-sufficiency” (McDonald, Allen, Westerfelt, & Piliavin, 1996, p. 41; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 122-123).

SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 reviewed the findings and interpretations of my study. Throughout the chapter participants were described and data was analyzed using constant comparative analysis. Each session was described providing thick descriptions and analyzed to show that while these foster youth had learned self-advocacy through experience they should have opportunities to learn it through some form of direct instruction, which would be educationally just for this population.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The Conclusions Drawn from the Study and its Connection to Broader Theoretical Issues

My research question asked “How do emancipated foster youth perceive their preparation to act as self-advocates?” My research indicated that youth emancipated from care had not been aware of factors related to effective self-advocacy but have learned these skills on their own through experiences without any direct instruction and this is an educational injustice. These youth have learned self-advocacy, “like most successful people” through their home environment, schools, and other work places (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 132). The three youth participating in this research demonstrated that they learned self-advocacy through their life situations and circumstances, and through their experiences they had been indirectly provided opportunities to learn these skills. The three youth learned self-knowledge and self-responsibility in addressing their technical and adaptive problems to change the future of their reality through autonomous judgments.

The Cases. Each case provided a perspective of how they each practice self-advocacy on a day-to-day basis; an important aspect to note, because it is not a process that is static but evolving. Illustrated in the findings and interpretations is the idea that these youth practice self-advocacy skills and that it is a practice that will continue. Youth are fulfilling the requirement(s) of self-advocacy to understand the needs of others, present positive images of themselves, and deliver solutions with mutual benefits to all (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). In addition each of the participants are able to take personal responsibility for her future, plan, set goals, research facts, analyze information, identify allies and supporters, and review and adjust goals.

While government systems and programs have provided resources for emancipated foster youth, self-advocacy is being learned on ones own. The participants in this study have transferable skills through self-advocacy that will allow them to navigate their transition with greater ease verses an individual without these skills, who only knows to allow someone else to accomplish a task (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). Sara and Nancy displayed this in their use of public transportation to get to various destinations. Navigating bus schedules, locations, routes and the like can be difficult. The transferable skills through this process they have learned are embedded in the 12 components of self-advocacy where they must research and analyze the best route, and review strategies if they did not meet their goal of being on time or the bus is late. Erika used her transferrable skills to learn cosmetology and is working toward her own booth in a salon. All of these skills are transferable to other areas of their lives, where these youth can “adapt to changing situations and need not depend on learning new rules for each situation” (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006, p. 129). These youth have not simply learned self-advocacy and are ready to transition to adulthood. There is still a great deal of work to be continued, in that “government (took) them away from the care of their parents under the presumption that government can and should do better” (Courtney, & Hughes Heuring, 2005, p. 27; Osgood, Foster, Flanagan, & Ruth, 2005).

While they have learned these vital skills, learning self-advocacy does not necessarily translate into an emancipated foster youth’s ability to support their own future as self-sufficient adults. They will continue to need support as they develop their skills and grow them. Courtney & Heuring (2005) state this support should come from family, as it is recognized as an important contributor to successful transitions to adulthood (p.

31; Furstenburg and Hughes 1995; Mortimer and Larson, 2002). Since the government has been the family for foster youth the support for these youth should come from providing opportunities, in schools through daily lessons to learn self-advocacy skills and attain positive adult outcomes as youth learn decision making skills and the ability to assess their choices (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003).

Support for emancipated foster youth should come from self-advocacy instruction in public schools, given that public schools are charged with enabling the nation's youth to lead fulfilling and productive lives (Shore, 2003). The three participants illustrated the idea that they are working on their relationships with their birth families. Erika has conversations with her mother, Nancy supports her father's therapy, and Sara takes her mom to lunch. While their families are not in a position to directly support them these youth continue to need support from their government parent. It is not a support that is directly linked to finance, but one where public schools begin to focus on teaching self-advocacy as a means to prepare teens for independence because their birth families are not in a position and have not been in a position to fulfil this role (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006).

Teaching self-advocacy. While it is noted that schools should provide instruction for foster youth in self-advocacy, a limitation to the progress of self-advocacy for emancipated foster youth is that there are no formal programs that teach these skills (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006). While it is understood that many individuals learn self-advocacy skills on their own for foster youth as a vulnerable population they should not be subjected to the possibility that they may learn it. If the transition to adulthood requires considerable family assistance for youth in the general population, then it is likely to be especially challenging for vulnerable populations who have required additional

assistance, for example: emancipated foster youth (Osgood, 2005). These youth should be provided opportunities to learn skills that will allow them better transition to adulthood in order that foster youth may learn self-advocacy, and be provided opportunities to (a) acquire skills in identifying options, anticipate potential consequences, and access resources, (b) practice those skills, and (c) reflect on and learn from their experiences (Hoffman, 2003). Given the series of critical choices that these youth must face, self-advocacy promotes skills where they may make positive choices with mutual benefits. By teaching self-advocacy we allow youth direct experience and instruction to perform these skills. These aspects allow youth to have power and control in their destiny as they know and value themselves, plan to reach goals, act upon those plans, and learn from experiences (Field & Hoffman, 1994). Failing to teach self-advocacy only serves to further deny foster youth opportunities to practice skills necessary for adult transitioning, and takes them out of the decision-making process that many transitioning to adulthood are able to participate in (Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006; Bulgren, 1998; Hoffman, 2000).

Progress for teaching self-advocacy for emancipated foster youth is not impossible to overcome. Public schools can include self-advocacy in daily lessons to allow effective choices and decisions, which is one of the most important competencies for these youth to learn for a successful life after high school (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003; Hoffman, 2003). The goal is to directly teach self-advocacy to foster youth thus providing educational justice for them by changing the power relation for these youth from dependence to independence. Youth emancipated from the foster care system are able to learn self-advocacy skills on their own; however, it is less likely that they will if not directly instructed.

Successful emancipation in this research did not mean self-sufficiency, but ones ability to be self-reflective developing self-knowledge and responsibility for his/her future (Wehmeyer, 2002). Systems must beware their support of inequalities through not directly teaching self-advocacy. They prevent foster youth from direct experience and opportunities with processes of inquiry. When one fails to educate foster youth to understand successful adult transition and independence, by not allowing them to participate as self-advocates, we deny them the ability to participate in a process of questioning and reflective investigation that takes them out of the decision making process for their future. It is an injustice that pulls them out of their education process to learn advocacy skills for their future. It is important to recognize that teens in foster care must have real world opportunities to learn to become participating citizens through self-advocacy to create educational justice for foster youth (Youth Advocacy Center, 2001; Krebs & Pitcoff, 2006).

Educational justice calls us to build bridges between present situations and educational resources and opportunities (Lopez, Gonzalez, & Fierro, 2006; Merchant & Shoho, 2006). The three youth participating in this study have been served by their system to learn self-advocacy skills indirectly. As educational justice advocates we must recognize that bridges must be built between the present situations of emancipated foster youth and the educational resources and opportunities that self-advocacy allows one in their transition to adulthood. We must through “(educational) justice praxis” use research and scholarship, conference presentations, and pedagogical methods to articulate the discourse of educational justice for emancipated foster youth (Dantley & Tillman, 2006, p. 19-20). It is important that those who are “willing to struggle” do so in participating in

research that advocates the need for self-advocacy among emancipated foster youth (Scapp, 2006, p. 37). In doing so we serve as educational leaders for emancipated foster youth who “deliver some version of (educational) justice and equity” (Marshall & Oliva, 2006, p. 1).

Critique of Process Used

Most research and studies have their limitations. The limitations may range from participants to methodological designs. My research limitations to this study were: 1) there were only three participants, 2) and participants were the same age.

Phenomenological research, because of describing perceptions of a phenomenon/phenomena that already has occurred, usually includes a sample size of between 7 to 15 participants. I was limited in that I was able to recruit only four participants and one later chose not to participate. This limitation created a barrier to attaining greater credibility regarding the findings of my study.

The final limitation is that participants were the same age. Because all the participants were 18, they had just begun transitioning from foster care into emancipation. Had my sample included participants who were older, they may have provided information based on longer experiences of being emancipated.

Implications for Educators/ Practitioners and Academicians

Beyond this research is a focus on concepts related to self-advocacy as a component of educational justice for foster youth. Other youth may share stories similar to the three participants represented in this study; the educational injustice that exists is in our failure to directly prepare foster youth to advocate their needs by not providing youth participation in processes of inquiry and develop critical consciousness allowing them to

be transformers of their world (Freire, 1993). Education practices must include self-advocacy instruction as a means of developing problem-posing education, where individuals are able to develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world, with which and in which they find themselves (Freire, 1993). In this manner education will allow persons to view the world as reality in process and transformation, and persons as being in a process of becoming with an unfinished reality (Freire, 1993).

The next steps for educators, practitioners, and academicians are to focus on self-advocacy directly through curricular changes to provide students real opportunities to practice these skills and act as self-advocates. While Krebs and Pitcoff (2006) point out that many successful people learn these skills indirectly we should not assume that this is always the case. The youth in this study had learned self-advocacy on their own through experiences. Future research should work to show that it may be more effective to provide direct instruction with regard to these skills, and illustrate the educational justice of such practice.

“Emancipation equals freedom” (Erika, Nancy, and Sara); this educational justice belief comes from the participants in this study, and echoes Marshall and Oliva (2006) as they discuss the “war against inequities” (p. 2). The authors’ state,

Metaphorically, if not literally, we are still at war against the inequities that remain, even if, as some argue, those inequities are no longer callously overt and intentional. They may now be covert, subconscious, or even unintentional.

However, the latter kind of war against the marginalized is the most insidious and damaging because it persists in questioning or disregarding the view of the very

groups that continue to be hurt by institutional practices (Marshall & Olivo, 2006 p. 2).

The war is one for educational justice for emancipated foster youth who are not directly instructed in self-advocacy; they receive covert, subconscious, unintentional educational injustice because they are not provided direct instruction in self-advocacy. The foster system truly works to advocate for foster youth's needs; however, when we fail to prepare emancipated foster youth for adult independence through self-advocacy we damage this group. Our institutional practices must change in a way that we recognize that while unintentional the system has failed to prepare emancipated foster youth and should work to correct this educational injustice through institutional practices by directly teaching self-advocacy in public schools (Shore, 2003). Over the years much has been done to improve these practices, but "for some children that success is uneven" (Marshall & Olivo, 2006, p. 2). Our educational justice must work to create a system where our practice and instruction will be even for all emancipated foster youth.

The three youth participating in the study have learned skills that translate to the adult world in which they currently exist. Psychosocially, they have learned the skills necessary to support their future reality. They learned this indirectly through lived experiences. As educational justice advocates we must promote self-advocacy for adult transition through direct curricular instruction to allow emancipating foster youth a greater opportunity at learning self-advocacy skills, which will assist in their transition to adulthood. In like manner we need to "step out of the box of dichotomous thinking and move away from the either/or and toward the both/and" (Sanders-Lawson, Smith-Campbell, & Benham, 2006, p. 35). This is the idea that we do not have to throw

something out in order to teach self-advocacy. We can add it to existing educational practices that teach students the abilities to advocate their needs.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As a point of reiteration the significance of my study is to add to the existing research literature regarding self-advocacy of people emancipated from foster care. My study may provide foster care providers, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and other stakeholders an understanding of three people's experiences of being emancipated and their preparedness for self-advocacy through indirect instruction. It may also lead to other research related to the need to have direct instruction in areas of self-advocacy for foster youth in public schools. The power and significance of my study came through the voices of foster youth who shared their experiences about how placement prepared or failed to prepare them for emancipation to act as self-advocates. Through their voices the needs and values of these youth emerged. The need is to develop programs and curriculum that supports self-advocacy programs.

CHAPTER 6 SUMMARY

In this chapter the conclusions drawn from the study and its connection to broader theoretical issues is explored. The process is critiqued and implications for Educators, Practitioners, and Academicians are examined, as well as the significance of the study. Throughout the chapter the work of educational justice leadership for emancipated foster youth is recognized as not easy, in that it is work that engages the heart, mind, and body in ways that are exhilarating, yet highly stressful and physically exhausting.

Emancipated foster youth need our support as educational justice leaders to initiate programming, curricular changes, and policy changes that directly provide self-

advocacy instruction and opportunities for self-advocacy. By not allowing this we further subject these youth to oppressive conditions where they are not prepared for an adult transition. Self-advocacy provides tools to make choices, accept consequences, and analyze. It allows freedom in emancipation and is educational justice for all emancipated foster youth.

Growing up teaches one to deal with setbacks and rejections. The growth process also provides lessons on how to build on success. For foster youth sometime the lessons of set back and rejection are far too frequent and building on success infrequent. Understanding how to both cultivate success and manage rejection is key to the self-advocate as she/he must and surely will encounter both. It is through these setbacks and rejections that the participants build on their successes. Their willingness to not give in when faced with difficulty allows them to view their past success and see areas where they can continue for the future, serving as self-advocates, creating educational justice for the Nation's Children.

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Appendixes

List all appendixes in order

1. Informed Consent
2. Screening Questionnaire
3. Interview Guidelines
4. Access Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH STUDY INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

You are being invited to take part in a research study entitled THE NATIONS CHILDREN—I FED YOU FISH, NOW FISH ON YOUR OWN: *How do emancipated foster youth perceive their time in foster care has served them in becoming self-advocates for their own social and/or educational justice needs?* This study is being conducted by Jason C. Jones, doctoral candidate at the University of Redlands under the direction of Dr. Gary Stiler, professor in University of Redlands’ School of Education. Please be assured to the following guidelines related to your participation in this study:

- a. your participation is voluntary
- b. you may withdraw from this study at any time, without giving any reason and without fear of penalty or recourse
- c. the confidentiality of all persons participating in this study is assured and will remain according to the guidelines and procedures listed below.

Purpose Statement and Research Question:

The purpose of the research study and its interpretations will help in answering the question: *How do emancipated foster youth feel their time in foster care has served them in becoming self-advocates for their own social and/or educational justice needs?* It is the potential of this research and the intended result to allow emancipated foster the youth the opportunity to speak their stories and share their experiences regarding their preparation as self-advocates as they transition to adulthood. The information will be presented in such a way as to best share their stories. This will be done in a classic way of presenting evidence through tables, charts, figures, exhibits (i.e. pictures), footnotes, quotations, narratives, and documents. I will remain honest with the research intentions and goals to allow for these youth to be properly presented, represented, and no longer silenced. While the information here in may not be readily generalizable to all emancipated foster youth it will be important research to add to the conversation of social and educational justice.

Methodology:

This study will utilize illustrative case study methodology and use open-ended interviews to collect data. I, as the investigator, will ask the participants for “the facts of a matter” as well as for their opinions about events. The interviews will take place individually with each student. Each interview will be recorded using an MP3 recording device for record keeping, and all participants will be aware of the presence of the recorder.

Participants will be asked to participate in three one-hour interview sessions.

The first session will serve as an exploratory session, where I will work to investigate and examine the participant with the hope of finding out about she/he as an individual. How they perceive their transition to adulthood and preparation for such transition.

The second session will go into greater depth to understand his/her perception and gain deeper insight into their development of self-advocacy. This session will also serve to verify data collected in the previous session and check for accuracy.

The third session will be confirmatory and link to literature as a process of theory building and analysis using both within case and cross case analysis (Myles and Hubberman, p. 36, 1994).

Participation Risk

There are no personal risks and/or discomforts to participants. Every effort will be made to respect your time limits and avoid any and all inconveniences to you. A possible benefit of participating is that you may learn more about yourself and how you are key in your transition to adulthood. This does not constitute a guarantee that you will receive any benefit from this study; however, it does mean that this is a possibility.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained according to the following guidelines. With the exception of individual and/or group discussions, any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Some information will be shared in a group setting and as such in this context, this information cannot be guaranteed confidentiality. However, the only information shared at this meeting about you will be self-disclosed. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Redlands has reviewed and approved the present research.

Jason Jones will be happy to answer any questions you may have before, during, or after the completion of the study. I can be reached either by email jason_jones@alvord.k12.ca.us or by phone [REDACTED]

You will be provided a copy of this letter to keep for your records. Below you will find a signature line. Your signature indicates that you have decided to participate, and that you have read the above information.

Printed Name

Date

Signature

Jason C. Jones, University of Redlands—Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Screening Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is designed to determine your possible participation with the study THE NATION'S CHILDREN—I Fed You Fish Now Fish On Your Own. Below are questions that should be answered honestly. Answering these questions does not constitute any value or judgment regarding your person. In like manner answering these questions does not guarantee your participation. It only serves to provide insight for the researcher in selecting the individual(s) best suited for the research objectives.

1. What is your name and age?
2. What is your sex?
3. How long have you been in foster care?
4. How many homes have you been placed in or is this your only home?
5. How many schools have you attended and if you are still in high school are you current with all your graduation requirements?
6. How have your advocates (social worker, foster parents, lawyer, school personnel, etc.) helped you with your transition out of foster care?
7. Do you feel your advocates have supported your transition in becoming an adult?
8. Do you feel you can take care of yourself once out of care?

Interview Guidelines Script and Timelines

Script

The following guidelines are established to protect the safety of all participating parties. As a participant it is understood that you have signed a consent form giving the researcher your permission to participate in the study. Your assurances in participating in the interviews are as follows:

- Participation is purely voluntary and if one chooses to leave at any point she/he may.
- If a participant feels interview questions (reference attachment A) are too stressful then she/he has the right to ask to pass that question, skip it, or stop the interview, at which time the interview will be stopped.
- No deception will be used in this study.
- Participants will be provided a copy of his/her consent form and the researcher will keep a copy.
- All consent forms will be held separate from the data collected in a locked file cabinet.
- The MP3 recordings will only be used for transcribing purposes and for data analysis. They too will be kept in a locked file cabinet.
- The recordings will be kept in the locked file cabinet for one year after their transcription. After that time the recordings will be destroyed.
- Once the study has been completed, all transcriptions will be held in the locked file cabinet separate from the individual consent forms.
- Any information, documents, or artifacts that an individual would like to have returned will be returned no more than one month after the end of the study.
- All other materials will be safely stored away.

Timeline

Initial Interview: Week of March 30th (1 hour)

Follow-up Interview: Week of April 6th (1 hour)

Final Interview: Week of April 13th (1 hour)

Interview Questions/ Situational Factors

(Please review attachments C and D for the types of questions and examples that will be presented to participants).

Access Consent Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a doctoral student with the University Of Redlands School Of Education under the direction of Dr. Gary Stiler. I am currently conducting research entitled THE NATION’S CHILDREN—I FED YOU FISH, NOW FISH ON YOUR OWN: *How do emancipated foster youth feel their time in foster care has served them in becoming self-advocates for their own social and/or educational justice needs?* This study is designed to allow emancipated foster the youth the opportunity to speak their stories and share their experiences regarding their preparation as self-advocates as they transition to adulthood.

I am writing to ask permission to contact emancipated foster youth at your site/ agency about being potential participants in my study. One or more participants may (or may not) be selected from your site.

Participant(s) involvement will primarily include interviews and observations. Those who choose to participate in the study will do so on a voluntary basis, and may choose not to participate or stop participation at any point without penalty. All participant(s) confidentiality will be maintain in accordance with their informed consent, and the results of the research study may be published, but the names and participants and the school site/district will be changed to protect anonymity per your request. The participants’ identities will not be associated with their responses in any published format unless otherwise noted by the individual. Informed consent will be obtained from the participants prior to the end of the study.

The findings from this project may provide information on how emancipated foster youths’ life stories and beliefs inform their practice as self-advocates and might contribute to the current educational literature. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call me at [REDACTED] or email me at jason_jones@alvord.k12.ca.us. You may also contact Dr. Gary Stiler, my faculty advisor, at gary_stiler@redlands.edu.

You will be provided a copy of this letter for your records.

Your signature indicates that you grant permission for me to contact youth in your program, having read the above information.

Printed Name

Date

Signature

Jason C. Jones, University of Redlands—Doctoral Candidate
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

