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Pedagogy of Agency:

Examining Participatory Action Research as a Tool for Youth Empowerment and Advocacy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Education

by

Mark Angelo Bautista

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Pedagogy of Agency:

Examining Participatory Action Research as a Tool for Youth Empowerment and Advocacy

by

Mark Angelo Bautista

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Ernest Morrell, Chair

It is argued that social toxins present in urban environments often stunt the growth of youth living in those areas (Gabarino 1995). And because of a deficit perspective of urban youth of color, some research has tried to argue that young people coming from those upbringings both perpetuate their own demise, academically and socially, and lack the desire to change their situations (Ogbu 1978, 1991). Although this may seem to be the grim reality of young people in urban areas, similar to scholars (Solorzano and Bernal 2001; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008; Cammarota and Fine, et al. 2008), I argue that low-income youth of color in urban areas actually are resilient and find ways to cope with if not transform inequitable conditions that they face on a daily-basis. In this dissertation research, I focused on the ways in which five students from a large urban high school in Los Angeles participating in the Freedom Scholars Program

developed their sense of agency and advocated for themselves and their community by conducting participatory action research, a research methodology that positions young people as critical sociologists and experts of their own experiences (McIntyre 2000; Morrell 2004). I address these following questions with this research: *1. How do urban youth negotiate/mediate cultural deficit perceptions engrained in dominant society? 2. How does their participation in a youth research program shape and influence their development as active agents in their school and community? 3. How are urban youth utilizing research as a pedagogical tool to a) resist deficit perceptions, b) teach others of their schooling experience, and c) actually transform inequitable social conditions?*

Through a mixed-method, ethnographic, participatory action research design, this project examined how these five students over the 2010-2011 school year theorized and acted upon this concept of *agency*. As second-year continuing participants of the Freedom Scholars Program, they utilized the space and learning opportunities in this college access program to develop critical youth participatory action research (YPAR) projects that focused on pertinent issues in their schools and surrounding community. I argue in this dissertation study that in their processes of enacting their agency, the five students moved from doing research about their schooling experience to teaching and influencing others to change their schooling conditions, which I refer to as a pedagogy of agency. In building their pedagogy, these five students developed the potentials and capabilities as legitimate experts who presented their work to members of their community, as well as decision-makers as part of their efforts to transform their existential experiences in and out of schools.

The dissertation of Mark A. Bautista is approved.

Tyrone Howard

John Rogers

Allyson Tintiango-Cubales

Ernest Morrell, Committee Chair

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2012

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It is no surprise that young people living in urban areas must deal with countless social toxins on the daily (e.g. sub-par learning conditions, poverty, violence, lack of social services, and many more), making it almost impossible for them to survive let alone academically succeed (Duncan-Andrade 2009). Because of a deficit perspective of urban youth, the larger society believes that young people coming from these upbringings either perpetuate their own demise or do not have the abilities to change their realities (Wyn and White 1997; Akom 2003). Although, this may seem to be the grim reality of young people in urban areas, through this dissertation research, I argue that youth residing in urban areas are actually resilient and find ways to not only cope with but also transform the inequitable conditions they face, eliciting this concept of *agency*.

My Personal Counter-Narrative

I am a man of color who has unapologetically reaped the benefits of my immigrant father's hard work. My father, a Filipino college graduate, came to America with the gross intent to leave behind the ills of a post-colonial Philippines to give his children a first-rate private, Catholic school education, and thus a brighter future. At the very surface, I can be coined a "model minority," jockeying up the ranks of this educational system and standing before you having attained the highest of accolades in a doctorate degree. To my own decree though, I am privileged yet humbled by the stark life of 3rd world poverty that could have been my life had my dad not taken the fateful journey to America.

All this being said, the privileges afforded to me did not come without downfall. Being raised in a predominantly White schooling experience, I always felt that I was overlooked and

dismissed as the quiet Asian kid in the class. When I got to high school I fell through the cracks and quickly realized that no adult cared about my academic trajectory because I was not White and I was not an athlete (I attended a high school that was most noted for its sports programs and academics, and I supposedly was not good at any of those things.) So, while I watched all my classmates get accepted into four-year universities after high school, I matriculated to the community college system and through my own sense of agency, navigated my way to a four-year university. I arrived at San Francisco State University (SFSU) and started taking Ethnic Studies courses. This is where I started to understand that the type of education that I received as a youth was not designed for me nor did it address my needs as a person of color.

My time at SFSU represented a pivotal turning point in my life; I began to slowly decolonize my mind set. For the first time in my life I felt that I was finally receiving an education that was relevant. It was here that a few caring individuals took the time to mentor and help me understand my power as a student and as a person of color. As a result, these experiences gave me the confidence to begin my career as an urban educator. I felt that it was my duty to develop and facilitate learning experiences that were relevant to the lives of youth of color and that were critical of the racial and social hierarchies that dismissed my existence. It was my mission to make sure that no students of color felt invisible and hopeless as I once did. After a couple years of doing this work though, I soon started to realize that my mission was not an easy or simple task.

When I would have conversations with my students and they would discuss and critique the oppressive conditions happening in their schools and communities, I would literally cringe when my students would follow their critique up with an “oh well, I can’t do nothing about it” and “that’s just the way it is, Mark.” It would bother me because I knew they had the power to

change what they experienced. But I could never be angry with them because at different points in my life, I felt the same way—helpless to being oppressed. So, I kept on reflecting and asking myself what was it that made us feel helpless? As I immersed myself in the critical theories of education, I began to understand that one of the major barriers to self-awareness and sense of agency, was deficit perspectives of youth of color. The rest of society sees youth of color as not capable of achieving academically and socially and are actually perpetrators of their own demise. And we internalized these deficit perspectives, either fulfilling the prophecies or becoming paralyzed to do something about it. However, as I looked back at my own life journey and the trajectories of my students I realized that we all, in some shape or form, resisted and were resilient to our oppressions. This is when I realized that all oppressed people have agency, but it was just a matter of how we fostered it to fruition. I share this narrative with you because it is my anchoring purpose for conducting this dissertation research. As an urban educator and advocate for young people of color, it was necessary that I learn more about this concept of agency and the learning spaces that help young people actualize, develop, and act upon their sense of agency and resistance.

Statement of the Problem

This concept of agency as it pertains to young people of color living in low-income urban areas has yet to be identified and studied in the context of South Los Angeles. My concept of agency comes from theories of resistance that have conceptualized the ways oppressed people have waged ideological as well as literal battles against their oppressor. Additionally, as Freire (2004) alludes to in his book, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, there is pedagogy in the indignation and resistance of oppressed people. Therefore, what I hoped to do with this dissertation research was

examine the pedagogy of young people as they enacted their resistance to oppressive conditions in their schooling experience.

In Los Angeles there has been a long history of resistance and rebellion in the urban sections of the city. But little do we recognize the roles of young people in these movements and analyze their motives and processes. For example, if you look at the 1965 Watts rebellion, the 1968 East Los Angeles student walkouts, and the 1992 Los Angeles rebellion also known as the Los Angeles riots, the youth played a major role in those struggles. In each of these events mainstream media has portrayed the youth and the people in these oppressed communities as deviants and troublemakers for standing up for their civil and human rights. However, what the media failed to show in each of these events was an analysis of what people were resisting and how they got to these points of actions. Therefore, this is where this dissertation research comes into play. This research seeks to examine the agency of youth today as they represent the continuation of the legacy of resistance that has long existed in the marginalized communities of Los Angeles. The media and certain literature would like us to believe that urban youth cause the inequitable social conditions and misery that they live in. Through this research I argue that these deficit perspectives of urban youth are false and the youth that I have come across in my time here in Los Angeles resist and make an effort to transform their lived conditions.

Research Questions

Through this research project, I focus on the ways in which five students from a large urban high school in Los Angeles develop their sense of agency and advocate for themselves and their peers by conducting youth participatory action research (YPAR) in the Freedom Scholars Program (FSP). I addressed the following questions with this research:

1. *How do urban youth negotiate/mediate cultural deficit perceptions engrained in dominant society?*
2. *How does their participation in a youth research program shape and influence their development as active agents in their school and community?*
3. *How are urban youth utilizing research as a pedagogical tool to a) resist deficit perceptions, b) teach others of their schooling experience, and c) actually transform inequitable social conditions?*

All in all, it is my understanding that subjugated people do not just lie down and take oppression, marginalization, and even colonization. History shows that when one is equipped with the critical hope, the skills, and the resources to confront social injustice, human agency has the capacity to become transformative and even revolutionary (Newton 1996; Fanon 2004). Therefore, these research questions and this framework of resistance brought me to my research thesis. Even in the midst of oppression in school and in society, when urban youth are able to develop the mindset and acquire the skills and resources to navigate and resist inequitable social structures and relations, they have the potential to inform others of their situation and move closer to transforming the existential conditions in which they live and learn in.

Research Focus

The central unit of analysis in this dissertation project is the concept of youth agency and how students from impoverished living and learning conditions in urban Los Angeles utilize research as a way to understand their realities and develop the agency to change them. In order to better ground my understandings of agency for this project, I first turn to others that have theorized the concept as well. In his book *Making History: Agency, Structure, and Change in Social Theory*, Alex Callinicos (1988) traced the way agency was theorized in social theory.

Callinicos' scholarship on agency sought to demonstrate that human beings possess the power to collectively make history and transform social structures so that they are relevant to the needs of the common people. Overall, his scholarship was integral to gaining a deeper understanding about the potential for collective agency and action.

In tracing the discourse around agency, Callinicos turned to the way that Perry Anderson (1980) broke down agency into three distinct categories:

The first and the most typical form of historical action is the pursuit of private goals – cultivation of a plot, choice of marriage, exercise of a skill, maintenance of a home, bestowal of a name. The second type of agency, like the first, operates within the framework of existing social relationships, pertaining to the kind of ventures involving public goals, for example political struggles, military conflicts, diplomatic transactions, commercial explorations, that are the stuff of conventional narrative history. Finally, there is the unprecedented form of agency involved in the collective pursuit of global social transformation (Callinicos, p. 9).

When thinking of agency as articulated by Anderson, I envision three distinct types of agency that individuals can embody. First is individual agency as it is manifested in fulfilling personal goals and aspirations that benefit an individual. A second type of agency is one that actually helps sustain public goals and structures. Finally, the third type of agency, which Anderson depicts as being 'unprecedented,' is one that transforms and changes the world. Although envisioning agency as a theoretical construct embedded within the struggle between the have-nots and the social determinism of social structure was useful to refer to, I further push Callinicos' analysis and see agency as more than mere reactions or responses to specific conditions, but rather see agency as a lived process, experience, and as Freire (1970) and Fanon (2004) would call it a critical praxis of resistance and liberation.

In the theories and literature that talk about resistance, scholars have referred to the many aspects of agency as decolonization (Fanon 2004), liberation (Freire 1970), self-defense (Newton 1996), radical healing (Ginwright 2010) and transformative resistance (Solorzano and Bernal

2001). Tying these concepts to my understanding of the agency of urban youth, I turn to Yosso's theory of community cultural wealth (2005) because instead of thinking of the deficits of communities of color or deficits of young people, I look at the wealth of knowledge and experience that young people and communities of color actually own. When I think of agency, Yosso's ideas of navigational and resistant capitals come to mind. These forms of capital can be understood as the "hustle"—not as in cheating someone or other people, but the agency needed to survive. Hustle is about having the ability to improvise and make sound decisions concerning one's well being in the present moment and for the future. Knowing the duress that people in urban communities like South Los Angeles go through, this concept of "hustling" is a necessity.

Yosso's concept of navigational capital comes into play in the "hustle" when young people learn how to navigate their way through structures and challenges in order for them to reach their goals. Yosso gives an example of how college students utilize 'strategies to navigate through racially-hostile university campuses [drawing] on the concept of academic invulnerability, or students' ability to 'sustain high levels of achievement, despite the presence of stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly at school and, ultimately, dropping out of school (p. 80).' Her use of navigational capital can also be instrumental in understanding the processes that high school students undergo to successfully navigate institutions. Looking specifically at Panther High School, students still go to school and achieve academically in the face of the statistic that says only 2 out of every 5 of them are going to graduate (UCLA Institute for Democracy 2010) . Yes, part of the journey to graduating involves working hard and studying, but the other part is about being able to gather the proper resources and tap into the proper relationships to navigate through all the hoops and stressful situations that their life in schools and out of schools puts in front of them. Navigational capital talks about

how to move through institutions that were not created with the success of ‘Communities of Color in mind’ (Yosso 2005).

Another part of students’ agency is being resistant to systems and ideologies that are oppressive and dehumanizing. Yosso (2005) writes, “resistant capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Freire 1970; Giroux 1983; McLaren 1994; Bernal 1997). Knowing that many of these institutions like education were not built with Communities of Color in mind, when the system was ineffective and oppressive, the only way to survive or protect one’s community was to resist. Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) show that students’ resistance can take form of several different types of oppositional behaviors from self-defeating to reactionary to conformist behaviors. However, the final and most critical oppositional behavior that they highlight and is most relevant to this research project is transformative resistance.

When informed by a Freirean critical consciousness (1970), or recognition of the structural nature of oppression and the motivation to work toward social and racial justice, resistance takes on a transformative form (Yosso 2005). Solórzano and Bernal’s (2001) concept of transformative resistance comes into play when young people take actions to transform the institutions or conditions that are ineffective or irrelevant to their lives; in turn, helping develop new structures to address their needs and those of their communities. As a researcher, I investigated how this idea of transformative resistance played out in the agency of students in Panther High School. What are the ways they influence and impact the institutions that run their lives by doing YPAR? As research shows (Solórzano and Bernal 2001; Morrell 2004; Oakes, Rogers et al. 2006; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008), young people and students of all grade levels can utilize their collective powers and knowledges to influence public policies, change the

functions of institutions, and demand inclusiveness and even equity in decision making processes. It is important in this research to understand that young people and underprivileged communities, in general, cannot be seen as only falling victim to oppressive institutions and ideologies, but rather need to be seen for their strength and agency in transforming their worlds. All these pieces of literature and my research findings have brought me to my definition of agency—agency is about developing critical consciousness about inequitable institutional structures and power relations that perpetuate oppressive conditions and taking individual and collective action to address those conditions.

Therefore, YPAR lends itself as one of those tools that can assist young people in developing their sense of agency as researchers, educational advocates, and ultimately, informed participants in society. Cammarota and Fine (2008) posit YPAR as a process and tool in “which youth resist the normalization of systematic oppression by undertaking their own engaged praxis—critical and collective inquiry, reflection, and action focused on “reading” and speaking back to the reality of the world, their world (p.2).” The significance of YPAR includes its political grounding and foundation in student action. YPAR has been used not only to address inequitable conditions happening in education (Morrell 2006; Cammarota and Fine 2008; Romero, Cammarota et al. 2008), but also have been utilized to examine and address racism and other social oppression in certain communities (Tuck, Allen et al. 2008; Aguilera 2009), stereotypes of young urban women (Cahill, Rios-Moore et al. 2008), and more generally social conditions happening in certain urban and suburban areas like San Francisco Bay Area and Tucson, Arizona (Akom, Cammarota et al. 2008). However, this research project, in line with other scholarly work (McIntyre 2000; Morrell 2004; Torre, Fine et al. 2008), specifically positions youth not only as researchers, but also as experts on the conditions of their education.

I argue that, when given the proper channels and educational opportunities such as engaging in YPAR, some urban youth acquire the ability to effectively learn about the inequitable conditions happening in their environment while acquiring the skills to educate others about the issues directly affecting them and their communities. This is what I posit as pedagogy of agency, which I will further define in the following chapters.

Context of the Research

Returning to the discussion on the legacy of resistance in Los Angeles, as I mentioned earlier mainstream media has focused and demonized the actions of the resisters and many times overlook the oppressive social and political conditions that actually brought them to these acts of resistance. Therefore in this section I focus on the oppressive conditions that the people of South Los Angeles have been put under. Borrowing from Fanon (2004), I think of these oppressive conditions as the ‘violence’ of colonization in the context of South Los Angeles.

South Los Angeles is representative of many other urban cities in the United States. Although, this area definitely has its own distinct culture and unique living conditions particular to this part of Los Angeles, like other urban areas in the United States, the people in this region deal with the vicious legacy of racial isolation, political disenfranchisement, and economic strife (Anyon 1997). As much as the participants’ ideas and experiences of agency are the main focus of this study, an analysis of the environments that the students live and learn in is also vital in that it gives us context to the issues at hand and a better understanding of what young people in these areas have to deal with.

The geographic location of South Los Angeles is a very important factor to consider when gauging the types of agency and mentalities that youth equip themselves with. Although there are no official borderlines, it can be argued that South Los Angeles is geographically and

racially isolated (Sides 2003; PBS.org 2010). South Los Angeles, officially renamed in 2003 from South Central Los Angeles, “is home to nearly 10 percent of [Los Angeles’] residents. If it were its own city, South Los Angeles would be California’s fourth largest (PBS.org 2010 March 5)” with most of its population comprised of Black and Latino populations. Fenced in by the 10 Freeway on the North and 105 on the South, 110 on the East and 405 and La Cienega on the West, South Los Angeles covers an area of eight by eight square miles (PBS.org 2010 March 5). In *Ghetto Schooling*, Anyon (1997) argues that the geographic and the racial isolation of the major urban areas in the United States perpetuate impoverished conditions on the people living there. According to a youth-led participatory action research project on how the historical and current economic conditions have impacted the livelihood of people residing and going to school in the South Los Angeles, it was found that young people endure and still manage to work through many adverse situations and challenges (A.O.C. 2009). Some of the challenges that the youth researchers highlighted were the high levels of impoverished conditions due to low educational attainment and lack of local employment opportunities (Ong, Firestine et al. 2008; PBS.org 2010). Being that 43% of residents in South Los Angeles are without a high school diploma, residents are limited to the types of jobs available (Sides 2003). More than half of the residents in South Los Angeles earn less than the living wage (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2009), and more than 14% of residents are unemployed (Ong, Firestine et al. 2008)—a rate 37% higher than the neighborhoods with the next higher rate. What we gather from this information is that South Los Angeles is economically poor with limited career opportunities.

The harsh economic situation and the impoverished living conditions are a recipe for destruction of the populations of people living in the area—an equation that adds up to what

Duncan Andrade (2009) refers to as social toxins and stressors that invade the lives of young people. Aside from economic strife, the youth of South Los Angeles must also confront situations of violence and crime that are all too common to poor, urban areas across the United States. In South Los Angeles violent crime in 2008 was at a rate of 14.7% which is twice as much as the county rate of 6.3% (Ong, Firestine et al. 2008).” And within these rates of violent crimes, “the homicide rates among South L.A. adolescents and young adults (ages 15-34) account for 76% of deaths, 200% higher than the county wide rate (The California Endowment 2007)” (Ong, Firestine et al. 2008). According to one of the participants of the youth-led project on South Los Angeles (A.O.C. 2009), these statistics show a high rate of what he called “access to death.” The participant explained “When we wake up in the morning and walk through our neighborhood we have a higher ‘access to death’ than other people in other neighborhoods. What kind of learning, what kind of experience, what kind of growth are you going to have if you are afraid to leave your house?” With this dissertation project I ask myself similar questions. Being that stresses of violence and crime are evident in youths’ everyday lives, how are they supposed to function, let alone succeed in school under such duress? These statistics and understandings of violence happening in South Los Angeles gives us another side to the endless issues that youth living in the area must face.

As if handling all of the factors such as economic strife and violence outside of school were not enough, urban youth in South Los Angeles must also deal with the dismal quality of public education in their communities. Compared to one of the top-performing school district in California, there was a large discrepancy between the graduation rates of LAUSD and Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD) (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2009). While 93% of all students in PAUSD graduated high school, only 65% of students in

LAUSD earned their high school diploma and only 20% have fulfilled the necessary A-G requirements needed to attend a California State or University of California public institution, meaning only 1 out of 5 students in LAUSD are eligible to attend a public university. More specifically, at the high school that I focused my research on, Panther High School, there is only a 40% graduation rate and only 13% of students graduate with their A-G requirements (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access 2010). Knowing these statistics, I was able to gauge the inefficiency of the public education system, specifically in the urban area of South Los Angeles. Therefore, these dismal statistics raise questions of these institutions' ability to support students in their outside lives when they are not able to support their students academically. This is a dismal reality for urban youth in South Los Angeles. A large majority of them are falling through the cracks while conditions continue to worsen.

Reviewing the cumulative impact of all of these stressors (the personal, social, and academic issues) that occur in South Los Angeles gives us an idea of the many challenges that the youth must navigate themselves through. However, what I would like to note is that even in the face of all these stressors, young people are still often blamed for their own oppression and they are perceived deficitly because they are connected to their environment. I argue though, that through it all, young people, even in the midst of destructive conditions and violence, stay indignant (Freire 2004) and are able to survive and still achieve their life goals while also transforming the conditions in their communities. Tupac Shakur (1999) referred to young people in urban areas as roses growing in the concrete. Shakur argued that in the midst of adverse conditions, life still grows in the impoverished, oppressive condition of the concrete. Since young people in poor, urban communities like South Los Angeles have to deal with countless social toxins and stressors in and out of schools, it is vital to understand how youth

develop their sense of agency and what tools and learning spaces like YPAR can help them on their paths.

Current Study

Using a ethnographic participatory action research framework for this study, I studied the agency of five students from Panther High School and the ways they react to the social conditions in their school and community. The five student participants of this dissertation study were participants in the Freedom Scholars Program (FSP), a college access program, where they conducted YPAR (Morrell 2004; Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008) on their surrounding community and school. The FSP after school program at Panther High School was the main space where my research took place. The overarching goal of this study was to show that YPAR was an effective learning experience and space for students to participate in and develop their sense of agency.

With this purpose in mind, I analyzed the processes and experiences of these students at they conducted research and thought about and enacted their agency inside and outside of their school during the 2010-2011 academic school year. Using a mixed method approach of the FSP after school space, I highlighted the different narratives that showed students developing their sense of agency, advocating for their peers, and teaching others about their research findings.

Organization of Dissertation

In this chapter, I first brought to light the importance of studying the agency of youth in South Los Angeles and how YPAR poses itself as an opportunity to develop young people's sense of agency. I then moved on into the statement of the problem, stating how there is a lack of scholarship that looks at the processes of resistance and agency, especially in the context of young people from an urban area like South Los Angeles. My statement of the problem then

brought me to my research questions that guided my data collection and analysis throughout my dissertation. From there, I went into my conceptualization of agency bringing together several pieces of literature from social theory to critical race theory and resistance theory. This provided me a context on how I was going to gauge the agency of the five students from Panther High School as they developed YPAR projects around the conditions of their school. From my conceptualization of youth agency, I then went into the backdrop of the research project, giving a synopsis of the oppressive social conditions that the youth and their community face daily in South L.A., which led me to a description of the current project. Lastly, I concluded this chapter by talking about the overall importance of how this study has the potential to contribute to existing literature that recognizes and pushes for a grounded theory of youth agency.

In chapter two, I will go into the existing literature that has led me to my framework of understanding this concept of agency and its importance in urban plight and youth participation. First, I situate the concept of agency as it has been constructed in social theory as a response to structures of society. From there, I move into a conversation of critical pedagogy and how learning and teaching are integral to the resistance of inequitable social relations and conditions. Within this conversation, I look to also pinpoint the aspects of critical pedagogy that helped me understand youth agency as being transformative. Finally, I end the chapter with an analysis of critical youth studies and YPAR as they are relevant in the FSP after school space at Panther High School. The literature states that when youth are engaged in participatory action research it can help them develop the critical and academic literacies that better prepare them for academic achievement in secondary and higher education and help them survive in life in general. I conclude this chapter by providing a recap of how all these different pieces of scholarship

brought me to my framework of examining the agency of five students from Panther High School.

In chapter three, I give an outline of the overall participatory action research design and methodological structure of this project. From there, I will go into a description of the research site and my role and responsibilities as facilitator and researcher of the FSP after school educational site over the 2010-2011 school year. To bring this chapter together, I show the four phases of my data collection and talk about the significance of each phase in trying to understand the agency of the five student participants. After a synopsis of the four different phases of data collection, I give an overview of how I analyzed the data and came up with my claims and findings.

In chapter four, I go through my findings and analysis of the data. I break this chapter into two main parts: 1) the development of the students' critical consciousness and 2) the process and impacts of their actions. In the first part of the chapter, I focus on the students' experiences in conducting their research and how the various methods that they used provided them with lessons to help in the development of their critical consciousness. After describing the development of the students' critical consciousness, I then move into the second part where I examine the students' actions in addressing their findings from their research projects. Their main vehicles of action were presenting their research findings at three different events throughout the year to various audiences. From these presentations, I pick apart the data that show the development of their sense of agency and how it led me to my grounded theory of youth agency.

Lastly, in my chapter five I revisit the lessons that I have learned through this study and try my best to concretely define my grounded theory of pedagogy of agency, breaking apart the

different aspects of what pedagogy of agency entails: self-defense, critical consciousness, advocacy, and self-determination. After defining my grounded theory of pedagogy of agency, I then go into the significance of this concept for urban education, youth participatory action research spaces, and, overall, the development of marginalized youth in urban areas, leading me into my recommendations and demands for urban educators, researchers, and broader educational reform. Lastly, I go into the limitations of this research and conclude the dissertation with a broader analysis of this research within a national and international scope of revolution and resistance.

Significance and Importance of Study

The overall goal of this study was to emphasize that every youth in urban areas, especially those that live and go to school in South Los Angeles, need to be engaged in the tools and learning experiences that can help them develop their sense of agency. Not all urban youth have the spaces and opportunities to develop their sense of agency. Therefore, this research study, as it takes a closer examination at a space like FSP will provide us with a better sense of how to build more critical spaces and structures that push youth be actively involved in their education and in the broader society. This study contributes to the body of scholarships around participatory action research and critical pedagogy; as we continue to develop these areas of educational scholarship I hope to further dismantle deficit perceptions of youth and communities of color in urban areas while at the same time pinpointing the effective learning models that push for student re-investment in their education and civic duties.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To contextualize the research questions in this study and to develop a nuanced understanding of youth agency, my theoretical framework is grounded within four main bodies of literature: *social theory*, *critical pedagogy*, *critical youth studies*, and *youth participatory action research*. Combining these bodies of literature elicited a change of perspectives; from traditionally deficit cultural notions of urban youth and their communities to deeper understanding of how young people resist, navigate, and even transform dire conditions in their environment. In order to better facilitate this change in perception, we must also be keen to the types of learning experiences and relevant tools that young people need to be equipped with for them to actualize their potentials as social agents. These bodies of literature also helped me understand the ways in which urban youth, specifically the five student participants of this research, moved from a place of empowering themselves to a position of empowering others. I refer to this process as pedagogy of agency, a theoretical concept I unveil throughout this research.

Overview of Chapter

Throughout this chapter, I set out to develop the concept of *pedagogy of agency*, weaving its relevance through the literature of critical pedagogy and other critical theories that strive towards an education that is liberating and humanizing process for oppressed peoples. I begin with the concept of agency and how it has been historically situated within the social theory of structure and agency. This gives us a window to the discourse of the ways in which people have the power to respond to social structures and conditions; reality is not just something that happens to people but rather reality is something that can be manipulated, resisted, and transformed (Gramsci and Forgas 2000). Critical pedagogy (Freire 1970) asserts that when

oppressed people are engaged in a process of learning about the inequalities in their reality, they are better equipped to transform their lived conditions. I show that pedagogy—the processes of learning and teaching—has been an underlying force that has been historically used to influence and organize people to resist. I then, move from an understanding of the agency of oppressed people to a deeper, more critical analysis of how young people have integral roles within social movements and social transformation. Although this more critical perception of young people lends us the opportunity to see the power and complexities within their processes of resistance, we are faced with the reality that not all acts of resistance are productive and/or transformative. Finally, I look at how the critical research methodology of youth participatory action research can push young people to develop a sense of agency that is transformative.

Introduction to Pedagogy of Agency

Referring back to how agency was defined in chapter one, Callinicos (1988) breaks down the concept of agency into three different categories: 1) agency that manifests itself in fulfilling personal goals, 2) agency that sustains public goals, and 3) agency that actually strives for transformative global change. For the sake of this study, I utilized Callinicos's definitions of agency to help me gauge the different ways agency manifest itself through the five student participants of this study. But even more so, I also set out to explore the ways in which the agency of urban youth embodied pedagogical practices.

For the sake of this project, I envisioned human agency as not just random acts or reactions to human condition (1968) but rather as processes and practices of individuals or collectives with intent; I wanted to show how agency could be framed into very effective, calculated actions to counteract oppressive conditions. I weaved together the pieces of literature within this chapter to show that within the process of theorizing and enacting agency there is a

potential to mold agency to where it becomes pedagogical. Antonio Gramsci (1991), when talking about how individuals strategize against social hegemony, the ruling of an elite class over society through coercion and consensus, he cites the concepts of war of position and war of maneuver. Using these concepts of warfare, Gramsci envisions war of position as the opportunity of the underclass to theorize and organize against their dominance. Once the underclass moved into a war of maneuver, they shifted into a mode of confronting the political society, the ruling class and their structures. The concept of pedagogy of agency reflects Gramsci's concept of warfare. I argue that in the processes of enacting their agency, the five students in this research project moved from a place of research (war of position/theory) to a place of teaching (war of maneuver/action. This analogy to warfare represents the need and the struggle of the underclass or oppressed people to take power because it will not be given without force. In talking about the unwavering persistence enslaved people must embody in order to free themselves, Frederick Douglas in the West India Emancipation speech he delivered in 1857 stated, "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will" (Rochester 1857). He goes on to say that injustice will exist and worsen as long as the oppressed say nothing and do nothing about it. The only time reality will change is when people resist and fight for their liberation. Paulo Freire (1970) shows us that liberation can be won through a pedagogy that humanizes; oppressed people must engage in the development of their understanding of their position in the world and within the social relations that bind them to oppression. With the development of what Freire calls critical consciousness, the oppressed people will then be able to rewrite their worlds towards freedom. Therefore, in knowing that young people in urban areas are trying to free themselves from oppressive conditions, what processes do they need to go through to liberate them from these dehumanizing realities?

My self-reflection as an educator is to naturally question, how do we then help youth through these processes? What can we learn from the ways that this idea of agency has historically been conceptualized and how can this study contribute to this field of knowledge by looking at youth and their theories and actions of agency? What can it tell us about our own pedagogy as educators and the types of resources we need to provide or fight for so that our youth can actualize a reality that is humanizing and liberating? Through this chapter, I surveyed the literature so that we may begin to uncover a nuanced conception of youth agency that is pedagogical, humanizing, and transformative.

Social Theory of Structure and Agency

In starting the conversation about the agency of young people, we must first situate the concept of agency and its existence in response to social structures. What is central to the concept of agency is the relation of people's response to social structures and their functions. At its inception, this duality of agency and structure was about how people responded to the conditions created by social institutions and societal relations and vice versa. In looking at the agency of people from oppressed populations like urban youth of color, I am cognizant of the role that social structures and institutions play in perpetuating conditions that are oppressive. This brought me to the literature around social theory. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, along with Karl Marx and Max Weber, Emile Durkheim was known as one of the most prominent philosophers in history to legitimize sociology as a science; a science that examined the structures and functions of society and the impacts it had on people. This idea of social theory was born out of the work of Durkheim, specifically in the topics of suicide (1965; 1968), religion (1968), and later on in education (1956). Social theory at its conception was a lens to examine the ways that society was socially, politically, economically, and culturally constructed

to impact the ways that people thought and acted in the time of the period of the industrial revolution. What was most notable about Durkheim's work was that before him other scholars did not see the viability in looking at how social structures and institutions impacted people's thoughts and actions.

In order to further understand the relationship of structure and agency, I paid closer attention to Gramsci. As a Marxist philosopher from Italy in the early 20th century, his most notable contribution to the struggle against bourgeois values was the way he highlighted the struggle of the proletariat as not only an armed struggle but also one that needed to be fought on the ideological and cultural fronts (Burke 1999, 2005). In his scholarship he introduced the concept of hegemony, or the dominance of an elite class over the rest of the population not just by force but more so by consensus (Gramsci 2000). Gramsci's theory of hegemony was so ground breaking in that it debunked the understanding that ruling classes only held their power through force. Rather, social modes of production and political governance perpetrated by the elite class were only able to survive through the spread of the ruling class' "system of values, attitudes, beliefs, and morality" that support the status quo in power relations (Boggs 1976). In the spirit of Marx, Gramsci saw that the structure (i.e. economic structure) was maintained through superstructures, institutions and societal relations that either coercively or inexplicitly rationalized the reality of the historic bloc (Gramsci 2000). Thus, dominant class structures were dependent on the formations and reformations of these superstructures. Most importantly, within superstructures and what was central to Gramsci's theory of hegemony was the role that ideology and culture played in keeping common people submissive to bourgeois values and institutions; ruling class ideologies and culture manifested itself into what was known as the "common sense" of the people. With the help of Gramsci's theory of hegemony, I gained a lens to better

understand how the status quo of inequitable power relations are maintained and how oppressive conditions in urban America, like South Los Angeles, remain unchallenged.

Gramsci also theorized the concept of counter-hegemony. If one wished to break the hegemony of ruling class domination, they must engage in a struggle that worked towards both structural and ideological change (Burke 2005). Counter-hegemony is relevant to this proposed study of examining youth agency in that urban youth need spaces that prepare them to understand the need for structural change while at the same time develop their ideological critique in questioning the status quo (bourgeois values). Acknowledging unsatisfactory conditions and the ambition to change the status quo is the easy part. But beyond that- when one is equipped with the strategies, frameworks, and ideologies to understand the root causes of oppression, one can then truly gain the ability to change those conditions. Representing a counter-hegemonic space, the Freedom Scholars Program (FSP) provided the students with the resources and engaged them in critical pedagogies that challenged them to be critical and contributive social actors. Thus, it is of critical importance for me to study spaces like FSP as it gives me insight into what it takes to develop the agency of urban youth so that their actions have a fighting chance in influencing and transforming inequitable structures.

Engaging in Pedagogy of Revolution

We can see throughout history revolutions and social movements earmarked times when there was a need to challenge and even, in some instances, overturn the status quo. In this next section, I looked to certain theorists and activists to learn about the pedagogies that they used in their respective struggles. Freire (1998) writes, “Behind every revolution is pedagogy.” In grounding a theory of youth agency, I have come to understand that in any struggle of liberation and fight for social justice, teaching and learning has been an integral vehicle for sustaining and

getting social movements off the ground. I construct the concept of pedagogy of revolution in that I want to gauge how agency has been taught, learned, and embodied in past social movements. In developing this concept of pedagogy of revolution, I saw examples of it manifesting itself in various areas: decolonization, radical healing, self-defense, advocacy, and self-determination. When I conceptualized youth agency and its impact, I gauged their focus in these certain areas. But, just as important, I also situated these different manifestations of pedagogy in the ways that the students initiated their agency on the personal, local, and also global levels.

Decolonization and Radical Healing

When students initiated their agency on a personal level, I saw them engaging in the development of their own critical consciousness, the decolonizing of their minds, and a radical healing process. I explore these concepts in this section.

Frantz Fanon is most noted for his analyses in post-colonial theory around decolonizing thought processes and cultural production within the Algerian revolution (2004). Having studied medicine, specifically psychiatry in France, Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, examined the impact of French colonization on the psyche of natives from the country of Algeria. Fanon talked about how French colonization oppressed and brutalized the psyche of native Algerians, creating a legacy of more than 500 years of mental and physical terrorism on the native people. However, what was most noteworthy about Fanon's examination of the colonization of Algerian people was the process of decolonizing their minds and their livelihoods from the control of their colonizers. These processes of decolonization eventually led to the revolution and later liberation of the nation of Algeria. Fanon (2004) wrote,

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History...Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The “thing” colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation (p. 2).

The Algerian people had to endure a process of humanization in order to liberate themselves from their oppressed states. To the French colonists, the Algerian people were considered less than human; they had to truly believe this rationale in order to colonize the Algerian people for so long. Only when the Algerian people humanized their subjugated states of being were they able to recognize their self worth and deconstruct the dehumanizing conditions they were held under. Fanon understood that revolution was not the end to the process of liberation. Even after liberation, Fanon came to the conclusion that one had to constantly stay engaged in the struggle; the process to liberate one’s self from oppressive human condition is a continuous day-to-day struggle with constant reflection and action. This is relevant to the students in FSP in that when they collectively engage in an endeavor to address inhumane conditions, they must keep an on-going dialogue and reflection about the plans of action that still need to take undertake to address their situation. The processes of critical praxis and decolonization necessitate a constant reflection and action towards humanizing their existence as social agents.

Radical healing (Ginwright 2010) is an idea that we can also attribute as part of developing critical consciousness and going through the process of decolonization. Ginwright developed this concept in the fight to engage young Black youth in social justice work. Having worked with African American youth for over twenty years, Ginwright found that they were

constantly challenged with an abundance of social, cultural, and political issues perpetuated by inequitable structures and conditions: from internalized racism to violence in their lives to issues of economic instability. He argued that as a form of political resistance African American youth needed to engage in a process of radical healing in order to recognize and fully reach their individual and collective potentials. Ginwright highlighted four areas of black life that contribute to the radical healing process: 1) caring relationships that “prepare black youth to know themselves as a part of a long history of struggle and triumph,” 2) safe spaces and communities that help facilitate this process, 3) the development of youths’ critical consciousness of their social worlds and how to resist social toxins, and 4) utilizing culture to “connect young people to a racial and ethnic identity that is both historically grounded and contemporarily relevant” (p. 10). Although Ginwright’s research was based on the experiences of African American youth, his concept of radical healing process is applicable to all urban youth, especially to the students in this study. To engage in agency at the personal level, I see the decolonization of minds and engaging in the process of radical healing as applicable to the process that students undertake while in FSP.

Self-defense, advocacy, and self-determination

Now going from the personal level of agency to the local, I look into the ways that pedagogy has been appropriated for self-defense, advocacy, and self-determination. When I talk about the local level of youth agency, I am really pointing to the ways in which we can understand agency as a collective process. As much as these understandings of decolonization were appropriated in the context of Algerian peoples during their fight for liberation from France, it can also be used to understand the praxis needed in struggles against oppression all over the world, especially here in the United States. In studying the development of the Black

Panther Party here in the U.S., we can learn much from their understandings of self-defense, advocacy, and self-determination. In studying the works of past revolutionaries from other countries, Huey P. Newton (1973) wrote in his autobiography,

The only way to get freedom was to meet force with force. At bottom, this is a form of self-defense. Although that defense might at times take on characteristics of aggression, in the final analysis the people do not initiate; they simply respond to what has been inflicted upon them...then, too, there is always a chance that the oppressor will be overwhelmed.

Although, the mainstream may have deemed the Black Panthers as “gun-toting thugs” that were mere perpetrators of violence on police and the White establishment, the Panthers in all actuality were far from that depiction. The Black Panther Party was developed in response to the police brutality and the oppressive conditions that Black communities faced in Oakland, California and other urban areas in the United States. One of the first priorities that came about in their struggle for social justice was their right to protect and defend their communities from foreign powers like law enforcement that used brutality and intimidation to pacify communities. Therefore, in “meeting force with force”, The Black Panthers utilized their right to bear arms and even patrolled police activity as a way to stop police from oppressing their people. Like Newton said, they never initiated violence but only responded to oppressive actions when faced with that decision. What was intriguing about the Black Panther Party was they always made sure that they acted and organized within the boundaries of the law. This concept of self-defense was relevant to the development of youth agency in that the tools of research become weapons of self-defense. I am in no way advocating nor deeming the idea that young people publicly bear arms to address oppression, but I am arguing that there needs to be an awareness of the tools that can be used to defend oppressed communities. Just like the ways in which guns were used and

are still used to intimidate and oppress the Black communities and communities of color, conservative and traditional ways of doing research perpetuate similar if not more destructive impacts on those same communities up until today. However, I articulate here, like the ways in which the Black Panthers re-appropriated guns as a tool not to oppress but rather to defend their people, research when conducted critically can also be used as a tool of self-defense, empowerment, and agency.

As much as self-defense has played a large role for advocacy in the Black Panther movement, raising consciousness is how they began their organizing. Like Fanon, the Black Panthers knew that they had to articulate and name their oppressions in order to take action accordingly. Once they did this, they were able to move forward in solidarity with the community and develop such things as the Black Panther Party 10-Point Program (Newton 1973) and survival programs (Hilliard 2008). The 10-Point Program was a platform to address the needs of Black communities that can be summarized in the 10th point of the platform. “We want housing. We want clothing. We want education. We want justice. And we want peace” (Seale 2007). But until their platform was met, the Black Panther Party knew they had to create programs themselves in their communities that addressed needs such as “health care and food services, as well as a model school (Hilliard p. 3).” Ultimately, they created these programs so that they could practice complete control over the institutions in their communities while determining the destiny of their people—hence the concept of self-determination. These areas of pedagogy of revolution—advocacy and self-determination—are relevant to this study in that I see these concepts manifesting themselves in the ways that the students engaged in agency collectively. I asked myself, in what ways do the students use critical research as a vehicle for

advocacy and self-determination in producing relevant knowledge that addressed and put the needs of oppressed communities at the forefront?

Youth Agency and Critical Pedagogy

What connects the social movements and revolutions I mentioned earlier are their push to develop learning processes and opportunities to stand up to the status quo. I go into this section to illustrate how a pedagogy that is critical (Freire 1970) can lead individuals to a place where they can read and also rewrite their worlds. From Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, I extracted the core tenets of a humanizing pedagogy for oppressed people—critical consciousness, problem-posing pedagogy, and critical praxis—to understand the ways in which agency can be pedagogical. Through the lens of critical pedagogy, I wanted to show how research as a critical tool could be used to teach, to learn about, and address issues going on in urban schools and communities (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell 2008), eliciting this concept of pedagogy of agency.

Critical Consciousness

So, what does critical pedagogy have to do with agency? In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) talks about how pedagogy, when approached in a critical manner, can lead to a humanizing and liberating process for oppressed people. In the concept of youth agency, I see it as youth engaging in a process that humanizes their existence but also pushes them to advocate for themselves and change those conditions. In showing us how pedagogy can very much be a vital aspect in developing humanizing learning experiences, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) write,

Creating the conditions for suffering communities to hold structural and material inequities up to the light of inquiry is the first step in a critical pedagogy. Brazilian critical pedagogue

Paulo Freire (1970) suggests that the first step toward liberation from oppression is being able to identify and name your oppression.

One of the very first steps to a pedagogy that humanizes is the raising of critical consciousness or as Freire would call it *conscientization*, the ability to be aware of the socio-cultural realities that constructs one's existence. Like Fanon's understanding of decolonizing pedagogy, this was the time in which the oppressed people started to uncover the structures and power relations that kept them oppressed while developing the ability to name and identify the oppression and oppressor(s). This concept of critical consciousness was vital to understand in the concept of youth agency in that it was the foundation in which transformative change was possible. In the context of FSP, the first step of engaging them with a critical pedagogy was not telling the students what their issues are in schools and outside of schools, but having them learn and articulate for themselves the inequitable conditions they lived in.

Problem-posing pedagogy

However, in order to get to this point of critical consciousness, Freire argued a liberating and humanizing education necessitated a problem-posing pedagogy. With this in mind, he made the distinction between a banking model of education and a problem posing pedagogy. He argued that traditional education had been based on a banking model concept, dictating a simplified relationship between teacher and student, the one who knows all and the one who knows nothing. Students are perceived to just be empty "receptacles" that need to be filled with knowledge. "The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are (p. 23)." Freire saw this act of depositing as an act of oppression. Along similar lines Duncan-Andrade and Morrell wrote, "this model of education is the greatest tool in the hands of the oppressor. It is a

weapon used to prepare the oppressed to adapt to their situation as the oppressed rather than to challenge the situation that oppresses them (p. 24). Freire challenged the notion of banking education by stressing the development of problem posing pedagogy—an approach to teaching and learning that yielded a non-hierarchical relationship between teacher and students. Problem-posing pedagogy provided a space where both the teacher and students embark on a journey together to understand, learn, and teach one another about the subject matter. This related to the learning space in FSP in that both teacher and students were responsible for gathering data and developing knowledge collectively around their research topic. They both taught and learned from one another as they developed knowledge side by side. But, more importantly, through the whole process students (and even teachers) started to build and further develop, their critique of the world around them, bringing about this notion of critical consciousness.

In this research study, I argued that the concept of problem-posing pedagogy was not only applicable in the learning space but was also very relevant in the process of conducting critical research; just like the way it problematizes the teacher-student dichotomy in an educational setting it does the same for the researcher-participant dichotomy in a research study. Stressing an approach to teaching and learning that yields a non-hierarchical relationship between teacher and student, a problem-posing pedagogy does the same for the relationship between researchers, which in this case were the students, and their participants, their peers and people in their community. As critical pedagogues themselves, the students knew that their ideas around their research projects were not the only pieces of data that were valuable for their research projects. Rather they valued the voices and the experiences of their research participants just as much as their own. They understood that in order to transform the ill conditions they lived in, they needed to engage others who also live under the same conditions and work with them to

create knowledge that will ultimately change everyone's situations. Therefore, the concept of pedagogy of agency and its intersection with problem-posing pedagogy, as it is applicable in the context of the CYR manifested itself in three ways: 1) in the development of critical consciousness, 2) teacher and students learning from one another in the after school sessions, and 3) in the partnerships that students built with their community and peers while doing their research projects.

Critical Praxis

I feel that the last piece that Paulo Freire contributed to the concept of pedagogy of agency is critical praxis—the process in which theory informs practice and practice in turn informs theory through a constant reflection. This idea of critical praxis is so important to understand in the agency of youth, specifically as the students in the CYR conducted their research projects, because it was a practice of reflection that had to consistently engage in as they produced knowledge. Having worked with many different sets of youth in various capacities, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) laid out the cycle of critical praxis in five stages as they have saw it in their work:

Identify the problem.

Analyze the problem.

Create a plan of action to address the problem.

Implement the plan of action.

Analyze and evaluate the action.

When young people engage in the cycle of critical praxis in their agency they came to understand “that complex problems require complex solutions that must be revisited, revised,

and re-implemented to reach a full solution.” When we work with the students in the CYR, the research projects they develop were always open-ended in that there was no end-all conclusion to the work that they did. It was a process that they had to consistently engage and re-engage in until the issues that they were researching were fully addressed. And when it comes to comprehensive and effective education reform and social equity, unfortunately we are far from reaching the full capacity of those realities. Therefore, the students’ job was never ending. But, little by little with the knowledge that the students produced, they kept providing invaluable information to an end. So, like Fanon and his understanding of the day-to-day battle of decolonizing one’s mind, Freire conceptualized critical praxis as an everyday practice of thinking and acting and reflecting towards liberation. There is no panacea to oppressive condition. Rather, the war is fought and wrestled with on the daily. Thus, critical praxis not only becomes a process but a way of life that a critical pedagogue must choose to engage in.

Now in asking myself what does critical pedagogy have to do with youth agency, I understood that the ideas behind critical pedagogy, to engage in a humanizing and liberating education, the raising of a critical consciousness, the development of problem-posing pedagogy and the choice to engage in critical praxis, informed my understanding of what young people are capable of doing. In participating in FSP, the students in the program do all of these things. Now it was my job, through this research project, to extrapolate what I learned from the ways that they went about thinking and enacting their agency, specifically in the ways that they conducted research and also used research to inform others.

Studying Youth Critically

Critical Youth Studies

One of the more important responsibilities for me as a researcher in this project was being constantly aware and critical of the ways I interpreted the experiences of the five students. Some scholars (Frith 1986; Johnson 1993; Giroux 1994) have shown how institutions throughout the 20th century have conceptualized youth “as a threat to social values” and overall a threat to society (Wyn and White 1997). Even more so in the field of education, these ill conceptions of youth are actually more commonly used to describe youth of color in the United States and rationalize the educational gap that exists between them and their White counterparts (Ogbu 1990)—mostly blaming the students and their cultures for their deficiencies. In turn, these popularized, negative notions of youth have led the rest of society to perceive youth of color as a problem. I made it part of my mission to highlight the processes of individual and collective growth of youth from an urban area. I wanted to show how they responded to their environments and conditions. I grounded this dissertation in the true-to-life experiences and thoughts of the students that I worked with, making sure that their voices and needs moved the research. In order to go about doing this, I had to first make sure that I did not generalize their actions as a process of being a “youth,” but rather engaged their actions as responses coming from youth of color in an urban setting.

When thinking of young people, the general population has a deficit conception of youth based on race and class stereotypes. In the broadest terms, ‘youth’ has been used to identify populations of people within an age category, starting from 13 years of age to 25 (Wyn & White 1997). In the field of youth studies, Wyn and White suggested a rethinking and theorizing of this concept of youth. The general perception of young people was that all individuals go

through this process of growing into adult life and it is generalized that the experience is the same for everyone and that they all grow out of it. Conversely though, Wyn and White argued that conceptions of youth should be thought of as life processes that each individual undertakes on their path to adult life. In their argument, they explicitly mentioned that all youth do not go through the same processes and that each person experiences life differently in relation to the social, cultural, and historical conditions they are put under. Wyn and White (1997) stated that it is important to study young people's lives "precisely because the transition to adult life—for each individual—reflects both an individual and collective process. The very nature of youth was the result of social and political processes through which social inequality is constructed and reconstructed" (p. 5). Therefore, in this study I was vigilante in making sure that I engaged the students' action and thoughts as responses to their unique environments and circumstances. Since they come from a perspective of being underprivileged and marginalized, there was much that to learn about their processes for humanization and fight for social justice.

With a more critical lens to race, culture, and youth process, I looked to Akom's (2003) work on the oppositional behavior of female high school students from the Nation of Islam and his examination of youth resistance. In this piece, Akom challenged the oppositional-culture explanation in educational achievement. He showed that the oppositional culture and behavior of involuntary minorities, individuals from historically oppressed groups, do not constitute the rationale for the disparities in educational achievement as some literature would like us to believe (Ogbu 1990;(1978). Rather, his study of female high school students who were a part of the Nation of Islam was an example of how cultures opposite from the dominant culture can push its members to navigate and achieve in life, and for this instance school, in ways that are not in line with practices that support the status quo. Akom wrote,

Black achievement ideology is intentionally organized in opposition to the ideology of white supremacy and, as such, counters folk theories of black intellectual inferiority and hence contributes to a culture of academic achievement (p. 319).

Even though the females in his study embodied a culture that challenged the “culturally appropriate norms, attitudes, and behaviors” in the school, they achieved academically nonetheless through practices and a black achievement ideology that was true to their culture and religion. This study debunked the false dichotomy that if minorities assimilated to the dominant culture they would succeed and if they resisted they would fail. Akom showed that these female students were able to resist and succeed. What this entails for my project on youth agency was it provided me with a lens to look at the ways in which the five minority students of this study resisted the conditions around them, but did so in a way that was productive and conducive to their wellbeing and future aspirations.

Transformative Resistance

When I look at youth processes critically, I was also able to see that the actions that young people take were not just a symptom of their “youth” phase in their lives. But rather, I situated their actions as responses to conditions they were put under by social institutions. This brings me to a study that articulated the many ways that youth can resist oppressive institutional structures. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) in their research wanted to show how Latino/a students in Los Angeles responded to inequitable conditions of education in two time periods: the 1968 East Los Angeles school walkouts and the 1993 UCLA student strike for Chicana and Chicano studies. They wanted to create a framework to understand the different ways that these particular Chincana/o students actively resisted inequitable conditions, internally and externally. The most important tool that they created from their research study was a theoretical construct plotting out

four different types of resistance: reactionary behavior, self-defeating resistance, conformist resistance, and transformative resistance.

One of the main objectives of their study was to push back on the discourse and prior research that portrayed student resistance as only self-defeating (Willis 1977; MacLeod 1987; Foley 1990; Ogbu 1990; Fine 1991; McLaren 1993; McLaren 1994). They wanted to provide examples of “Chicana and Chicano student resistance that [were] based on an awareness and critique of social oppression and [were] motivated by an interest in social justice” (p. 320). Drawing from Giroux’s (1983a; 1983b) work on resistance, they argued acts of resistance intersect in two ways: 1) critique of social oppression and 2) motivated by an interest in social justice. From these themes, they created four quadrants to show how the four different types of resistance mentioned earlier moved along and across these lines. The purpose in creating these quadrants of youth resistance was to show that youth’s oppositional behavior was not static or limited to these four labels but rather these quadrants acted as points of reference to describe certain actions and their intentions they were studying. The following paragraph describes the four quadrants that Solórzano and Bernal developed and tie it into how it informs my own theoretical framework of youth agency and resistance.

The first type of oppositional behavior that Solórzano and Bernal described was one that neither had a critique of social oppression nor motivated by social justice—reactionary behavior. Their example of reactionary behavior was an individual that “acted out or behaved poorly” in class or in some other social situations acting out “just for the kicks.” Now moving from a similar type of oppositional behavior that was not motivated by social justice, but rather started to move towards a critique of social oppression was their idea of self-defeating resistance. They referred to this sort of resistance as the ways students’ resistance had been traditionally depicted.

Young people engaged in self-defeating resistance because they felt the oppressive conditions that they were put under but did not have the social critique needed to understand their state of being. Thus, they acted out or engaged in behavior (e.g. dropping out of school) that was resistant to their condition but did not help transform it. They were guided by some understanding of the systems of oppression, but engaged in actions that were harmful to their selves or others. The third type of resistance Solórzano and Bernal described was conformist resistance. This quadrant of oppositional behavior lied on the axis of being motivated for social justice but with no critique of the systems of oppression. Solórzano and Bernal wrote, “These students choose to strive toward social justice within the existing social systems and social conventions” (p. 318). Solórzano and Bernal provided an example of a student who thought the best way to address the high drop out rate in their school was to provide tutoring for his or her peers. This action or behavior worked towards social justice, but did not critique nor challenged the underlying causes for the under achievement of students at their school. There is no doubt that some social change was eminent within a conformist resistance, but “without a critique of the social, cultural, or economic forms of oppression, it does not offer the greatest possibility for social justice” (p.319).

The final type of resistance that Solórzano and Bernal offered us was transformative resistance, oppositional behavior that had the potential to yield the greatest chance for social change. Transformative resistance was situated in embodying both a push for social justice and critique of inequitable social relations. This by far was the most potent form of resistance in that it demanded a critique and a transformation of the status quo. This type of resistance embodied many of the concepts we have explored in this chapter. The development of critical consciousness and process of decolonizing one’s mind would link closely to the critique one

must develop to see the world for its inequitable properties. The concepts of critical praxis and self-determination could be seen as the organizing and action to push for social justice. Solórzano and Bernal found that the students that took part in the 1968 East Los Angeles school walkouts and the 1993 UCLA student strike for Chicana and Chicano studies embodied the concept of transformational resistance. These students understood the dire conditions them and their peers had to endure which, in turn, necessitated their call to action. However, one caveat that Solórzano and Bernal made sure that we understood was that these categories of resistance were fluid and not static. In making choices, young people can move from quadrant to quadrant based on their intentions and the actions that they take up. I utilized this framework because it helped me identify the types of resistance that the five students of this study enacted in developing their agency.

Now, moving from a discussion on youth and the different types of resistance that their actions can embody, I dive into the literature on youth participatory action research (YPAR) and how this methodology of research could actually move students towards the trajectory of transformative resistance.

Youth Participatory Action Research

Akom, Cammarota et al. (2008) described YPAR as simultaneously being “a methodology, pedagogy, and theory of action for creating social change and social justice” (p. 6). YPAR has been a way for youth to collectively investigate and respond to social conditions and structures that impacted their lives, heightening their participation in society (Torre, Fine et al. 2008). Growing out of the field of critical youth studies, this type of research positioned young people not as the subjects of research but rather as partners in the process and in some cases as actual principal/primary investigators in the research process. In a society that looked at young

people, especially youth from urban areas as deviants or perpetrators of their own demise that have no power in changing their realities, YPAR actually positions young people as intellectuals, experts, and social actors within and about their worlds. This type of research methodology situated youth as powerful individuals with something to contribute to the functioning and development of society. As it is applicable to this dissertation research project, literature showed that YPAR has been an effective tool in examining and addressing the inequitable conditions happening in students' education (Morrell 2006; Cammarota and Fine 2008; Romero, Cammarota et al. 2008). Additionally, as a research methodology that examines the all-encompassing social realities of young people, the scope of YPAR was not limited to just exploring educational issues, but has also been used as a vehicle to examine issues of racism (Tuck, Allen et al. 2008; Aguilera 2009), sexism (Cahill, Rios-Moore et al. 2008), and overall the intersections of social oppression experienced by young people and their communities (Akom, Cammarota et al. 2008). YPAR at its core was a form of resistance and agency to the oppressive nature of social hierarchies and inequitable power structures. In the following section, I aim to look at how the guiding principles and roots of such a research methodology explicitly inform my research on urban youth agency.

Participatory action research represents a radical shift from traditional notions of research in that it critiques and re-appropriates what is investigated and who does the investigating (Morrell 2006). McIntyre (2000) proposed that there are three principles that guide participatory action research. The first principle is the collective investigation of a problem. This differs from traditional research in that usually the researcher or researchers are separate from the subjects in their projects and the focus is on individual scholarship even with teams of university scholars (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, p. 107). What distinguished PAR projects from other research

methodologies was the emphasis on the collective enterprise in which the subjects, individuals who have been historically excluded from the research process, are now partners in the process (p. 108). This idea also talks directly to the second principle, which is the dependency on “indigenous knowledge to understand and examine the problems of greatest concern to indigenous researchers.” Indigenous populations are usually just the objects of research, but in PAR they are thought of as subjects and partners in identifying and understanding the issues most pertinent to their lives. For example, in some of the YPAR projects cited earlier, students’ knowledge and experience of their education was heavily relied on to understand the disempowering conditions they faced in schools. They are the ones that experience these structures and conditions on the daily, so strategically any researcher, including themselves in YPAR, would rely on their expertise when it comes to understanding their realities. Basically, these first two principles pushed back on the ways we traditionally conducted research because it pushed us to question the validity of gathering and making sense of our data; from who and how are we getting our data and was the information that we are gathering reliable enough to make strong claims about what was being studied?

McIntyre’s third principle of PAR is the push to take individual or collective action to deal with the stated problem. All of these principles of PAR mirror the ideas of critical praxis—in identifying the problem, analyzing the problem, creating a plan of action, implementing the plan of action, and evaluating and analyzing the action, with a conscious emphasis on taking these steps as a collective. The “action” part of PAR was what situated it apart from other paradigms of inquiry (Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, p. 109). Rather than just ending research with analysis of data and the implications of those findings, PAR pushed the researchers to think of ways to use the findings from the inquiry to take up some type of action to address the stated

problem. Literature showed (Bautista, Bertrand et al. Forthcoming) that certain YPAR projects have led youth to develop actions in the form of written reports and policy briefs (Cahill, Rios-Moore et al. 2008; Morrell 2008), the creation of websites (Cahill, Rios-Moore et al. 2008), poetry (Flores-González, Rodríguez, & Rodríguez-Muñiz, 2006; Torre & Fine, 2006; Torre et al., 2008), memoirs (Tuck, Allen et al. 2008), PowerPoint presentations (Morrell 2008), books (Torre & Fine, 2006), and slambooks (Tuck, Allen et al. 2008). All of these mediums of presenting research findings and taking different actions are acts of agency and resistance towards addressing the stated problems of YPAR projects. Like critical praxis shows, addressing issues of inequity and oppression is a constant ongoing process, where each step whether it be action or reflection keep building upon one another. Applying these principles and steps of PAR to this dissertation project pushed me to question when the five student participants were engaged in conducting YPAR, how did they move to take up individual and/or collective action from what they learned from their research? And when they took steps towards action, what did we learn from their pedagogy in making their findings accessible to others? Ultimately, through this dissertation I based my grounded theory of youth agency in the process of the five student participants as they conducted YPAR and how that impacts the ways that they think and act upon the world around them.

Conclusion

Through this chapter, I traced the ways in which agency has been conceptualized by different theorists and activists. I took those understandings to learn about the ways that urban youth develop their agency to not only resist but transform human condition. Let us be honest, we are talking about social change and social justice here. The conditions that I witnessed urban youth being put through inside and outside of schools were dehumanizing and oppressive. But,

contrary to dominant societal perspectives, I know that they have the power to change their condition. The main challenge and mission of FSP was assisting them in understanding and actualizing their own powers. Inequitable social relations will not just change because few individuals show their discomfort with the reality of the situation. Social change must be demanded and fought for. In the following chapters, I embarked on a journey with the five students from Panther High School FSP group to develop a counter-narrative that showed the development of their agency as pedagogical, humanizing, and transformative.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation is about researching how young people conduct research and the power and the agency they develop with one another in the research process. Therefore my methods somewhat mirror the research methods that was used by the young people involved in this study. The design for this research is both ethnography and participatory action research combined. First, in trying to make sense of the thoughts and behaviors of the students in the Panther FSP, I used ethnography because it “places a primacy on the importance of situated meaning and contextualized experience as the basis for understanding social behavior (Pole and Morrison 2003)” in our space. On the other hand, participatory action research (PAR), as a research methodology, lent itself to be a methodology in which I was able to engage the thoughts and experiences of the participants in co-constructing this research project with the ends of developing a grounded theory of youth agency and impacting future practices of YPAR learning spaces. By combining these two methodologies, I focused on the ways in which these students developed their sense of agency and advocated for themselves and their community by conducting youth participatory action research through the FSP.

In this chapter, I map out the mixed methods approach I used to capture these youths’ journey in developing and conducting critical and relevant research over the span of one whole school year. With this goal in mind, I developed a research protocol that helped me effectively analyze how the students developed their sense of agency. As a participant observer as well as co-facilitator of the weekly FSP after school sessions, I mediated my multiple roles and conducted an ethnographic PAR project to examine three specific areas of these students’ agency: 1) their process of conducting research as a collective, 2) their process of teaching about

their research findings, and 3) the development of their self-agency. These three areas allowed me a glimpse of how to make sense of youth agency in a specific, localized context, which is these five students' participation in FSP at Panther High School.

Overview of Chapter

In the beginning of this chapter, I first go over the research design of this study and the reasoning to why an ethnographic PAR design was the most effective vehicle in carrying out the data collection and analysis. Following the overview of my research design, I then take a closer look at Panther High School and explain why it was a relevant research site when examining youth agency in an urban context; a closer look at their school gave me a better understanding of the conditions that the students experienced and the ways in which they responded to navigate such a challenging environment. Preceding the breakdown of the school environment, I go into my role as a researcher/participant observer/co-facilitator of the weekly after-school FSP workshops at Panther High School and how the multiple roles afforded me vantage points to closely examine these students' processes. I then go onto an overall description of the participants and their importance in this study and their history and significance in FSP. Finally, I conclude this chapter with an overview of the methods I used to collect data and my process of analysis. I situated my data collection and analysis within four phases to help scaffold the development of this study. Although each phase may have occurred simultaneously and also at different times throughout the research, I am explicit in situating my data collection and analysis within these four phases in that each context warranted multiple opportunities for me to examine the concept of agency and how it played out within these unique situations.

Ethnographic Participatory Action Research Design

First and foremost, this research project is an ethnography on the thoughts and actions of both students and their adult allies in the Panther High School FSP space. I referred to an ethnographic research design to make sense of the FSP space because it embodied these five characteristics laid out by Pole and Morrison (2003):

1. A focus on a discrete location, event(s) or setting.
2. A concern with the full range of social behaviour within the location event or setting.
3. The use of a range of different research methods which may combine qualitative and quantitative approaches but where the emphasis is upon understanding social behaviour from inside the discrete location, event or setting.
4. An emphasis on data and analysis which moves from detailed description to the identification of concepts and theories which are grounded in the data collected within the location, event or setting.
5. An emphasis on rigorous or thorough research, where the complexities of the discrete event, location or setting are of greater importance than overarching trends or generalizations (p. 3).

With this research design in mind, I took the opportunity to use a mixed-method approach to gather my data while making meaning and exemplifying the subtle and not so subtle nuances of the group's processes. My mission throughout this research project was to document a comprehensive and contextualized description of our space and of the students' processes of developing their agency by conducting youth research.

On the other hand, I saw that it was equally as useful to also implement PAR as part of my research design because it gave me a chance to develop my project with the students and co-facilitators, engaging their ideas about youth agency and how I can further develop this concept and how we can also better develop the YPAR learning process to be more effective. Noffke (2009) talked about the three dimensions or, as I prefer to refer to them as, the purposes for PAR—the professional, the personal, and political dimensions of action research; she found that

these three areas and the ways that they intersect were the common threads that pushed the use of this research methodology. Therefore, PAR was a research methodology in education that could be used to develop the practices and infrastructures of educational spaces (the professional), the individual practices and ideological frameworks and perspectives of certain actors such as educators or teachers (the personal), and that could also be used as a vehicle to address current social issues and debates of the time (the political) such as using research to address and understand social inequality.

I picked PAR as part of my research design because I saw this dissertation project running across all three of these dimensions; on one hand, I was interested in learning more about youth agency and how it was developed in response to inequitable social conditions and deficit perspectives put on youth in urban Los Angeles (the political) while, on the other hand, as a graduate student researcher and co-instructor for the program for the past three years, I wanted to also reflect on how we could better foster and scaffold the process of youth agency in FSP at Panther High School (the professional). Lastly though, I wanted to also use this opportunity to inform my praxis as a critical urban educator and educational researcher (the personal). I also want to note that all the participants in this study, the five Panther high school students and the other two co-instructors, took the opportunity to also learn more about themselves and their roles and responsibilities in our space, in the community, and in academia.

Throughout the study I used both a deductive and inductive approach to conducting my research. Using a deductive approach, I started with a tentative definition of agency and how others have developed it over time. These definitions of agency provided me with a foundation to actually see the ways that agency might have played out in the FSP space and in these

students' lives. Conversely, I also utilized an inductive approach to this project by challenging and rearticulating my initial definitions of agency, helping me come up with a grounded conceptualization of youth agency as it was manifested in our space. Ultimately, I redefined my understanding of the concept as I learned more and more from the processes of the participants.

Using an ethnographic PAR design pushed me to collect data and analyze data simultaneously. I was forced to think on my feet and be in tune with the data that I gathered. As an ethnographer, I collected data in the different spaces that we occupied to gain a sense of the “true-to-life” narrative of how agency was experienced within and by our collective. Calling upon the three tenets of PAR (McIntyre 2000; Morrell 2006; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell 2008), I made sure that I approached this conceptualization of youth agency as a collective with the students and co-instructors in the Panther FSP site, implementing their ideas and feedback in my process of conducting this study. The action part of this research focused on, as I mentioned earlier, coming up with a grounded theory of youth agency while learning more effective ways to implement and structure the FSP program at Panther High School. With this research approach in mind, it helped me check my own biases as the researcher in the space and helped me develop a well-informed narrative through a system of checks and balances that represented the true-to-life lived experiences of the participants as they engaged in doing YPAR.

Site Description

Panther High School was a prime location for me to do this research since it was one of the main high schools that serve the youth in the area. Although Panther High was not exempt from all the bureaucracies and lack of resources that many urban public schools face, I initially felt that there was a sense of resiliency that existed at this school. Like I mentioned in chapter one, the youth living in the South Los Angeles area face many adverse factors, such as economic

hardship, social inequity, violence, and sub-par education. Through this research, I teased out the ways in which the five students who are second-year participants of FSP resisted these conditions. At the beginning of this study, four of the students were seniors and one was a junior that carried on the legacy onto the next year. All four seniors graduated and moved onto higher education while the fifth student continued his participation in FSP into the following year. Their academic achievement was one marker that showed that these students were agentic in actually navigating their way through their education. Therefore, Panther High School was a prime location to conduct this study.

Panther High School was a large urban school in which 2,300 students attended. According to UCLA Institute for Democracy and Education (IDEA) Educational Opportunity High School Report for Panther High School (UCLA Institute for Democracy 2011), the racial breakdown of the school population was 65% African American, 34% Hispanic, and 1% Multiethnic, a clear representation of racial segregation of schools in the 21st century. 14% of the students were English language learners and 60% received free and reduced lunches. Additionally, the College Opportunity Ratio (COR) for Panther High School was—100:41:15, meaning for every 100 students that come in as Freshmen, 41 graduated in the following four years and 15 were University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) eligible. In comparing this to the State of California's COR—100:66:25, we see there was a huge discrepancy in the ratio of students that graduated and are UC/CSU eligible; only 41% of students graduated and only 15% were eligible to apply to California's public universities compared to the state's respective 66% and 25%. This statistic led me to ask, what happened to the other 59% of student population at Panther High School that did not graduate? As the Panther students faced inopportunity as part of their schooling experience, how did they cope

with these conditions and prepare themselves for the future accordingly? If statistics showed that the odds were stacked against the Panther High students in graduating and moving onto college and into other facets of life, how did the five students participating in this research deal with such a reality? Furthermore, how did FSP and the process of conducting YPAR prepare them to deal with and address for themselves the ill conditions that they faced?

Access

For the past three years I worked as one of the co-instructors for FSP. For more than eleven years, this college access program, has engaged students from all over the city of Los Angeles in conducting critical research about issues happening in their education and communities. Only in the past two years has the Freedom Scholars Summer Seminar Program been expanded to continue on during the school year. Therefore, as the students from Panther High School continued the research study they started in the summer, I jumped in during the school year as a co-facilitator of the weekly after school program. Through my participation I gained access as a participant observer in the after school space. Before conducting any type of research though, I shared with the students and the other two facilitators the objectives and logistics of this dissertation project. Given the choice to participate in the study, all participants agreed to stay engaged throughout the full length of the project. Although, no harm from this study was intended, I made sure the participants were also aware of their right to discontinue the study whenever they felt necessary.

Researcher Role

In this study, I assumed the role of both a researcher and participant observer. As a participant observer, I visited Panther High School every Thursday for two or more hours to help facilitate FSP after school workshops. I co-facilitated the lesson plan for the week with the two

other instructors/mentors, Mr. Derrick, a teacher at Panther High School, and Mr. York, a graduate student researcher like myself from the local university. Aside from co-facilitating the after school sessions, I also collaborated with the students in an array of different activities they had going on for that week (e.g. brainstorming research topics, developing interview questions, practicing interviewing skills, actually interviewing key stakeholders at the school, analyzing data, strategizing the next steps to their research, and so on). In being a participant observer, I documented first hand the week-to-week rigor of the students building their agency through conducting research. My role as a participant observer/co-facilitator afforded me with an *emic perspective* to my research—an insider’s perspective that not just anyone off the street has access to. I felt an emic perspective spoke to the difference of doing research *with* the community rather than *on* the community. To better explain, one of the critiques of traditional notions of educational research is that it does not prioritize engaging in work with one’s participants and having their ideas move the research. PAR, on the other hand, values the collaboration between researcher and participants in developing the study. This was the manner in which I formatted this dissertation study; the research design enabled me to work closely with the students on a consistent basis as well as allowed me the opportunity to always engage their thoughts and ideas on my project. I made it explicit to the students that I needed their assistance in conducting and developing this dissertation study.

As part of my research strategy, I constantly documented through video and field notes the different interactions between all the participants in the space. After each workshop, I spent an hour writing field notes of the experiences of that day, making sure that my observations were fresh from the mind. I also documented their processes as they conducted their research projects around their school and when they presented their findings. Following the three principles of

participatory action research (McIntyre 2000; Morrell 2006) 1), I made sure that my dissertation was conducted in collaboration with the students, 2) my data collection was based on their first hand experiences as the indigenous inhabitants of the space, and 3) we worked together towards a collective action to the stated problems being studied in this research project.

Participants

As returning students in FSP, four out of five students, Emma, Fernando, Karina, and Ryan were considered veterans of the youth research program while Sasha, although fairly new, had the experience of participating first in the FSP summer seminar. All but Sasha had collectively engaged in conducting participatory action research projects in the 2010 annual summer seminar and for a second time the 2010-2011 school year. Although an analysis of their work in the program was a major focus of this project, I also explored the different ways that their work impacted their personal and academic lives. As for Mr. Derrick, it was also his second year as the teacher facilitator of the Panther High School FSP crew. As for Mr. York, it was his first time participating as a graduate student researcher in the program.

Four Phases of Data Collection

Referring to figure 3.1, my data collection was broken up into four different phases. In this following section I break down each phase and talk about the unique opportunities each phase posed in collecting useful data about the agency of the students and the impacts that this process had on them and their FSP adult mentors.

Phase 1

Phase one of collecting data was situated within the students' processes as they participated in the FSP after-school program at Panther High School as they conducted research

through the first six months of the school year. As a participant observer, this was an opportunity for me to witness and document the group dynamics between the students and facilitators as they conducted participatory action research (PAR) as a collective about the learning resources¹ at their school. As cited previously in chapter two, the first principle of PAR is the collective investigation of a problem (McIntyre 2000). In contrast to traditional notions of research and individual scholarship, conducting research as a group proved to be a strategic way of conducting research. This played on the sayings “two minds are better than one” and “there is strength in numbers.” These concepts were very important doing research as a group allowed for multiple perspectives to form a fuller critical portrait about what was really going on at the school. Every person in the group brought their ideas to the table about the research topic and how to go about conducting it. Therefore, as a participant observer of the space I wrote field notes during and after our sessions that documented the inner workings of the collective.

While the students conducted their research project on learning resources at their school, I conducted interviews with them to gauge their experience in doing research as a collective. Through these interviews I was able to gauge the strategies they developed and their experiences in 1) working as a group and 2) being youth researchers. This was important to note in that this research was not only unique because youth are doing PAR but also their perspectives as students brought a whole other dimension to doing research. Their lenses were grounded in their everyday experiences, giving them a solid foundation in how to navigate the best ways to collect data at their school and what to collect data on.

¹ Learning resources as defined by the students are the physical and metaphysical resources that are used to engage students at South Central High School in learning.

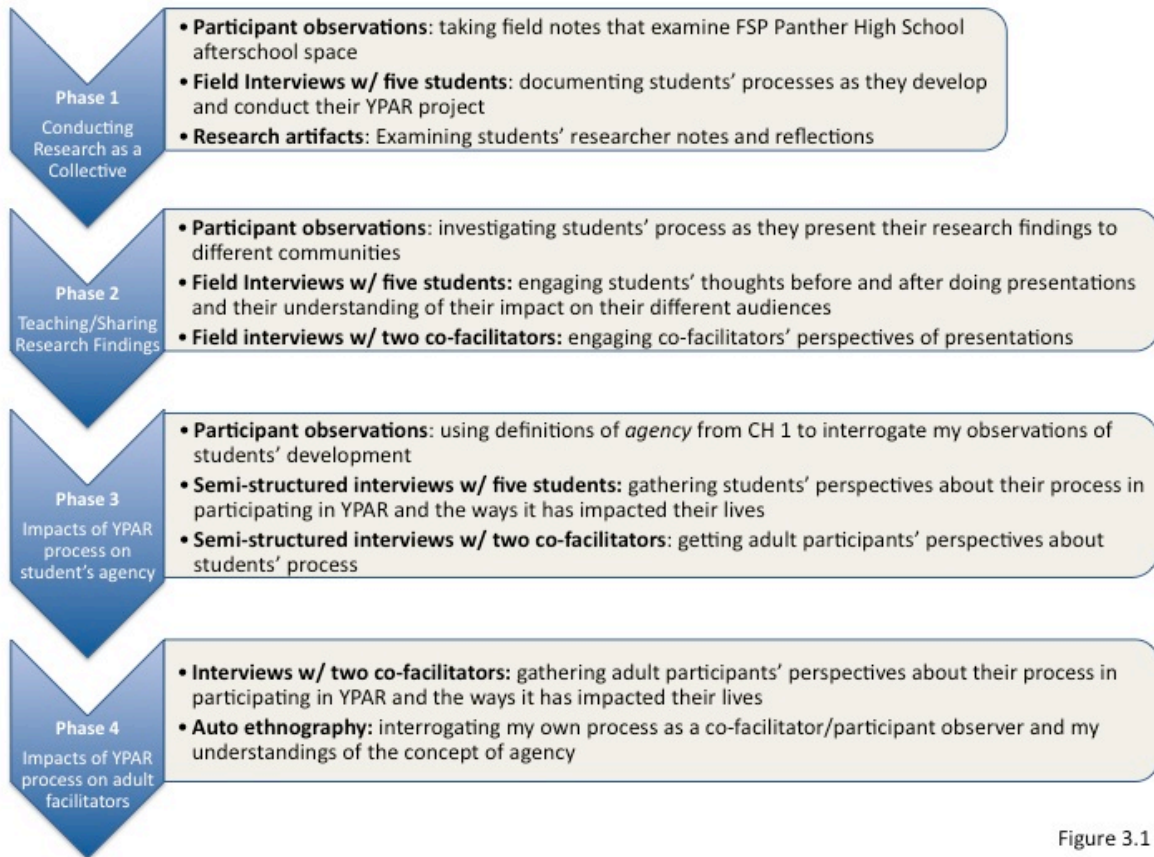


Figure 3.1

Lastly, in this phase I used the students' research artifacts, such as their PowerPoints for their presentations, researcher journals, and blog entries as another form of data. These artifacts represented the countless hours, effort, and sacrifice that the students put into their research project. The PowerPoints they created for their multiple audiences entailed their expertise about the subject matter while the journals entries provided me with a window into their thoughts and experiences about their processes, before, during, and after conducting research. All in all, phase one helped me situate the students' actual research processes in their academic and personal growth.

Phase 2

Phase two, on the other hand, focused more on the students' processes as they presented and taught their research findings to different audiences. This phase was situated more so after the students conducted their research project at their school. In this phase, I took the opportunity to do field interviews with the students before and after their different presentations. The three main events I captured were their presentations at their school, at a local presentation in Los Angeles to their parents, families, and other community members (i.e. teachers, administrators, local media, and graduate students) and finally at their presentations at the 2011 American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Conference in New Orleans to educational researchers and educators from all around the country. Each event was unique in that the students prepared presentations and engaged their audiences accordingly, highlighting and putting more emphasis on certain aspects of their research that they knew would create the greatest impact.

Additionally, phase two also helped me interrogate and construct the concept of *pedagogy of agency* enacted by the students. As I argued throughout the first two chapters, pedagogy of agency represented how the students moved from the roles of critical researchers to the roles of critical pedagogues. However, although I started with an initial concept of pedagogy of agency as it was situated within different pieces of literature and ideologies, this phase ultimately challenged my initial definition and helped me re-conceptualize the idea according to the data I collected.

Along with the field interviews I conducted with the students, I also interviewed the co-facilitators. After the various events, I interviewed the co-facilitators to get their take on the

students' presentations and their impact on the audience. Other than my field notes and observations, this was one of the few opportunities within this study where I was able to gauge the impact of the students on others. As much as I discuss the impacts of YPAR on the participants throughout this dissertation, I also explored the impact that the students' pedagogy had on others.

This then brought me to my last source of data collection for this phase, which were my participant observations. Throughout the school year I documented my interpretations of how they developed their sense agency. Within this process, I was also very intentional in examining their development into public intellectuals and pedagogues. I triangulated my field notes with my video recordings after each event to further enrich my analysis and interpretations.

Phase 3

Phase three of data collection focused mainly on the impacts of the YPAR process on students' agency. I used the data that I collected in this phase to challenge my initial definitions of youth agency and further developed my understandings of agency as it played out in these students' lives.

As for the interviews that I conducted in this phase, I used a more traditional interviewing protocol by conducting more formal semi-structured interviews with the students and co-facilitators. With the students, I gathered their perspectives of developing their sense of agency according to their timeline of participating in the FSP and developed a sense of their lives before, during, and after being participants in the program for a second year. My objective with these interviews was to trace the trajectory of these students over the past two years: what they were like before they joined the program, how their participation in the program and doing YPAR

impacted their lives and mentalities as a student and young person from an urban area, and how the whole process influenced their future aspirations and goals. As for the interviews with the co-facilitators, I used these opportunities to gain the perspective of adults that have witnessed these students' academic and personal growth over time. The participant observations, field notes, and interviews helped me triangulate my data on their growth.

Phase 4

The fourth and final phase of data collection situated the impacts of YPAR on the lives and practices of the co-facilitators in the FSP space at Panther High School. Overall, I constructed this phase to gauge the participation of the adult participants in facilitating YPAR. I asked the co-facilitators two main questions: How has the process of doing this type of work impacted their professional trajectory? And secondly, how has the students' agency impacted them? This was one of the other spaces within this study I was able to gather information that pinpointed the ways that the students' agency impacted others. Along with these interviews, I also examined the blog entries that they wrote throughout the year.

Lastly, the final piece of data that I used was my own process as a researcher/adult facilitator. Using an auto-ethnography method, I documented my own process and interpretations of my experiences in being an adult participant in the FSP space and what it taught me about the agency of youth from urban areas. This auto ethnography process pushed me to be transparent about my own biases coming into the study and made me interrogate how my views changed throughout the school year. It was my duty to be self-reflexive of how this process impacted my own life as a researcher and educator.

Data Analysis

Lin (2003) talks about the iterative nature of *explanation building* in which the goal for this project is to keep checking the patterns emanating from the data with my initial definitions of agency. For example, with each piece of information that I collected from the study I checked to see if it matched my initial understandings of agency or taught me a new lesson that I was not anticipating. As I learned new lessons about how agency played out in these students' lives, I developed more questions that interrogated these new understandings of youth agency. I used this process of data analysis throughout the study until I felt that most of the patterns led to similar notions of agency and I was able to make a coherent narrative of the development of the students' sense of agency. This goes back to my job as a researcher in that I made sure that I triangulated the data with different sources such as the words of the students and how they checked out with the stories of the teachers and my participant observations and so on. Overall, this process of building an explanation from the lessons that I learned was very time-sensitive in that I had to constantly push my understandings of youth agency throughout my data collection process. Ultimately, this process led me to create themes and generalizations about what I was learning about youth agency from this study.

After I collected all my data, I went back and transcribed each interview, each after school session we had, and all three presentations they did throughout the year. Then I went through all the transcriptions, videos of our after school sessions, student and teacher reflections, and my field notes and coded them. From these initial codes, I then developed parent codes that grouped the initial codes such as development of critical consciousness, resistance to deficit perspectives, enactment of youth agency, teaching others, and self awareness and self empowerment. Once I had a good sense of what my parent codes were, I developed claims that

became the main sections in chapter four. Lastly, I went back to my coded data and filtered out the most important quotes and experiences and wrote my analysis of each one.

There is no doubt that the ethnographic PAR design proved to be the best way for me to go about conducting this research. It kept me on my toes as a researcher in that I was constantly challenged to articulate and then rearticulate my understandings of youth agency. From the outset of this research, I knew I had to be comfortable in moving back and forth from an authority of this study to a student of this research.

In conclusion, this study sought to investigate the agency of five students from Panther High School and the ways that they resisted, navigated through, and even transformed inequitable conditions through YPAR. I hoped to illuminate the intersections of YPAR and critical pedagogy and how these sites teach us how to get young people engaged in their education and concerned about the broader conditions happening in their lives, in their schools, and in their communities.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

PART I. Developing Critical Consciousness Through YPAR

When I think about the empowering process of YPAR, the only way that I can picture it in my head is the way Cammarota and Fine (2008) describe it in *Revolutionizing Education*. The process of conducting YPAR is like the narrative of the movie *Matrix*. Similar to the way the main character, Neo, wakes up to the truth after ingesting the red pill, YPAR metaphorically is the red pill that urban youth use to see the social, political, and cultural power struggles and tensions that impact their world and educational experiences. Cammarota and Fine write,

After he ingests the red pill, Neo ends up in the place of truth, awakening to the reality that his entire world is a lie constructed to make him believe that he lives a “normal” life, when in reality he is fully exploited day in and day out. What is “normal” is really a mirage, and what is true is the complete structural domination of people, all people...Neo, may be unaware of the inflections of power fostering oppression. [However], the dawning of awareness emerges from a critical study of social institutions and processes influencing one’s life course, and his/her capacity to see differently, to act anew, to provoke change (p. 1).

The process of YPAR, as youth become experts of their educational experience and find their power to resist their oppression, gives student researchers a better sense of their power and agency. But throughout the YPAR literature, we still have yet to explore the steps that young people actually go through to develop their critical consciousness to be agentic. In this chapter, I explore more in depth how the process of YPAR facilitates the development of the five Panther student researchers’ critical consciousness. It is through this awareness of the injustices in their lived conditions that these five young individuals empower themselves to investigate and ultimately, move to action to address their condition. As much as I will illustrate how YPAR in FSP is a learning process that empowers these students to participate in their education and in

their community, I am also deliberate in pointing out how this research methodology is also a humanizing process that students use to deconstruct and heal from their oppression. Therefore, the first half of this chapter is dedicated to examining the multiple situations within the students' research process that contributed to the development of their critical consciousness.

Freire and Macedo (1987) wrote that a relevant education is one that helps students read and name their world. In this dissertation, I argue that YPAR is a site where we are able to witness youth develop their critical consciousness. Over the past year of documenting the students' processes of conducting research, I was able to pinpoint the moments in which I saw their critical consciousness developing. The more that they uncovered with their research, the more they became aware of their surroundings, giving them a sense of empowerment. Like Neo in *Matrix*, they took the blindfolds off their eyes and started to see that their educational and lived conditions had been socially and politically constructed. And for four out of five of the student researchers this was their second level of taking off their blindfolds and talks to the middle stage of their process in that this was their second year in FSP.

Beginning in the summer and into the school year, the student researchers in FSP questioned the effectiveness of the 2004 *Williams vs. State of California* decision. In summary, the *Williams* case was a class action suit filed in May 2000 by the parents of children that were “consigned to schools with the fewest qualified teaches, least adequate curriculum materials, and poorest facilities of all schools in the state. The plaintiffs claimed that these low levels of resources were evidence of California's failure to provide millions of children—primarily low-income children, immigrant children, and children of color with the basic tools of education (Oakes 2004, pp. 1889-1890). The 2004 settlement mandated that every public school in the state of California provide “equitable access to learning materials, a safe and secure campus, and

qualified teachers.” With this case under the microscope, the student researchers in FSP bore the responsibility of investigating the impacts that this case had on urban schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District, many of them representative of their own schooling experience. Ultimately, I argue that as the five Panther student researchers engaged in the mixed methods of YPAR throughout the summer and throughout the school year, they developed an informed critique of their educational experiences and conditions at their schools. In these following sections, I go through each of the methods they used in their research and examine how each led to the development of their critical consciousness.

Power of participant observation and visiting other schools

As a critical educator, I looked back at the year and asked myself how did we facilitate the development of critical consciousness? How did we develop a pedagogy and learning space that pushed the students and teachers to collectively examine the lived-experience of students at Panther High School? In this first section, I examine how the activity of visiting other schools was one of the integral parts to the development of these students’ critical consciousness.

Throughout the summer seminar and over the first few months of the school year, we scheduled field days where the students left their school to gather research information out in the community. Some of the most significant field days were the ones when the students went to other schools to examine what went on at other schools and the types of resources that other students their age were entitled to. During two field days the students visited one high school in one of the richest neighborhoods in Los Angeles and two other urban high schools like their own. Through these field days, the students began to see the discrepancies between the types of education that they were receiving compared a school in a wealthier neighborhood. In one of my first interviews with her, Sasha talked about “being able to know more than [she] knew before.”

Since Sasha moved to the area during her junior year, she had to pick a new school to attend and ended up picking Panther High School. Before becoming a student researcher, she thought Panther High was one of the better schools she had access to. However, after having visited other schools she gained a different perspective. In her first interview with me, Sasha talked more descriptively about the development of her awareness.

Before I thought [Panther] was a really good school. Because I have heard of worse, worse schools. So that's why I came to [Panther]. Because I thought it would be better than some other schools, but it's really not. If you know about better schools then it's not at the same level. It made me more aware of that.

In her written reflection of that specific field day, Sasha explained further how she came to this awareness of the discrepancies of education.

When my group went to Richside High School a teacher who gave us a tour of the school said that that school didn't have much either, comparing Richside to other inner city schools. But that school had a planetarium, three cafeterias, and a whole new science and technology building. While when my group went [back to Panther High School], teachers complained about not having enough time to teach students because of furlough days and the ESL and Special Ed teachers don't have enough staff for all the students. And when my group went to Innerside High, we saw how terrible the schools physical conditions were.

This process of visiting other schools was eye-opening experience for the students because for some of them they never thought to question what other students were learning and what their education was like. In this quote, Sasha started to make the distinctions between schools like hers located in an urban area to schools like Richside High, which is located in a wealthier neighborhood. Even though the Richside High School teacher that gave them a tour of the school was downplaying the abundance of resources that they actually had at their school, Sasha, on the other hand, saw with her own eyes that urban students did not have the same resources and they were put in poor learning conditions. Here are a few pictures that the students took to

document the differences between the various school environments. In this photograph of Innercity High School, the students documented how textbooks were being used not as learning material, but rather as a prop to hold up a locker.



Figure 4.1

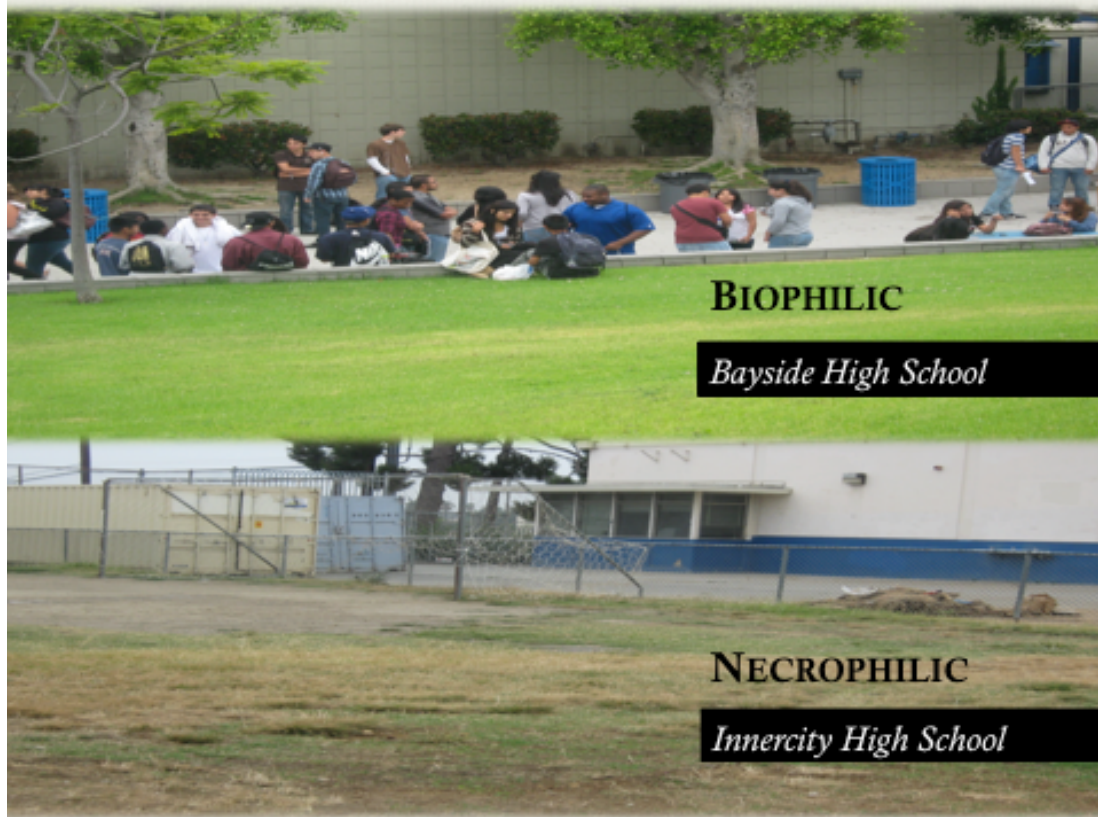


Figure 4.2

Similarly, Fernando came to the similar conclusions when he visited the different schools. In one of his presentations about the work that he did in FSP, Fernando talked about the stark differences he saw between school environments and added an analysis of how these differences sent specific messages to their students.

For example, while we conducted our research, I became aware that many schools in rich communities had open campuses that sustained plant life and looked like a college-preparatory environment. Biophilic spaces are important because they show the high expectations that schools have for their students. Which leads to critical thinking and independence. On the other hand, schools in low-income communities have gates within gates, bars on windows, and dead greenery, which represented a prison-like environment. Necrophilic environments represent the low-expectations that schools have for their students, which lead students to be dependent thinkers, and students often resist.

Fernando, being one of the four veteran student researchers from FSP as part of Panther High School this year, was originally part of the research group in the summer seminar of 2009 that

studied the social ecologies of schools. Relating this concept of social ecologies to the *Williams* case, Fernando's summer group argued that there was an eco-apartheid between wealthier schools and those in working class neighborhoods of color, meaning there was a discrepancy in the types of school environments that rich students had access to compared to working class students. Keep in mind in the *Williams* settlement, it was promised that students have access to "a safe and secure campus." Therefore, to explain the discrepancies of learning environments that the students had to deal with, they used the terms biophilic and necrophilic to describe the differences that they saw as they visited multiple school. According to Fernando's group biophilic meant a love of life, which was representative of the very green, healthy environments that wealthier students had the chance to enjoy while, on the other hand, necrophilic meant the love of death, which epitomized the dismal, under-resourced conditions that urban youth had to endure. Therefore, from this experience with his research group over the summer, Fernando remembered the concepts of biophilic and necrophilic spaces as they related to student education. And since this specific field day required them to document the differences and similarities of four schools, Fernando used the same analysis that he learned a summer ago to further specify his understanding of the school differences.

Fernando's analysis of the environment nonetheless provided a deeper understanding of what it meant to go to an urban school. He not only saw differences between the various schools but he placed meaning to the experience. If you go to "schools in rich communities" you feel welcomed and challenged to do well. But if you attend a school in an urban area that is "prison-like," the environment does not solicit independent and critical thinking. Fernando's statements were bold. He understood through YPAR that the lives of urban youth are not as valued as others, such as young people in wealthier neighborhoods. Society perceives urban youth in a

deficit light and their educational system and environment acculturates them for life in prison. This nonetheless perpetuates theories like the school to prison pipeline (Smith 2009) and reinforces deficit perceptions and practices put on youth of color. Youth are systematically put through a process that moves them from schools to jails. However, Fernando's analysis of doing investigative research provided a qualitative narrative and first hand account of how school environments actually impact students' self-efficacy as well as academic and life outcomes.

Their participant observations not only served as empowering experiences to demystify the reality of urban schools, but it also led them to their main research questions for their project. The 2004 *Williams* case settlement promised that all public schools be equipped with the proper resources for an adequate education. However, contrary to the *Williams* case policies that were supposed to make learning conditions more equitable, the student researchers saw with their own eyes that conditions at their school and other inner city schools were not conducive to their learning yet alone suffice for what the *Williams* case called an "adequate education."

Their participant observations brought them to question, what is an adequate education actually look like? How did the *Williams* case settlement define an "adequate education?" "The key points in the settlement [involved] ensuring that all California public schools [provided] students with the basic resources they [needed] to learn, including:

- Every student, including English Learners, must have enough textbooks and materials to use in class and to take home.
- Every school and classroom must be clean, safe, and in good condition.
- Every student must have a well-trained teacher according to standards set by California and federal laws (Just Schools California, February 2, 2011)."

Although the settlement devised a plan to make sure that students had the same amount of resources and had a clean and safe environment to learn in, the Panther student researchers felt

that an adequate education meant something different. In one of her presentations, Emma expressed the fact that, “According to the Williams case we are given an equal and adequate education. However, in our research we are arguing that an adequate education is not equal. And basic is not enough to be college competitive.”

They felt that an adequate education was a coded term for a basic education, and they deserved better than a basic education. They felt an effective education was one that set them and their peers up to be college competitive and helped them develop the skills and knowledge to contribute to the well being of their community. Therefore, focusing on learning resources, they devised a research question that helped them examine the resources that were available to them at their school and interrogated whether those resources set them up to go to college and become active citizens in their community. Therefore, their main research questions came out as, what learning materials are essential to ensure that students are equipped with the necessary skills for college and to receive a meaningful & valuable education? If we look at their process, they started their YPAR project with participant observations and their own experiences that eventually led them to their research question.

Since the *Williams* settlement in 2004, new standards and policies have been put into place to check if every public school in California is compliant. Every year school districts send *Williams* inspection teams from the county offices of education out to schools to check on their compliance. However, the state’s instruments of measuring and gauging *Williams* compliance seemed to have missed the mark according to the student researchers. In all actuality, with their research projects and through their research lenses as young people in urban schools, the Panther researchers uncovered the subtle yet destructive and dehumanizing conditions that the government liaisons often overlooked or missed because of their positionality as adults.

Therefore, their participant observations became jumping points for them to start to construct their research project. From their research question, they started to examine more in depth the situation at their school. All in all, these opportunities to venture outside their immediate surroundings and check out other communities were helping shape their development as informed agents of their community. Talking to my second main research question, how does their participation in a youth research program shape and influence their development as active agents in their school and community, their participant observations were the earlier steps of developing their ability to read their world. Once they developed the capacity to do so, it set them up to be active agents in their own community. In the next section, I examine the students' other methods of collecting more data and their process of learning critical theories to answer their main research inquiry.

Learning Critical Theories in Education to Demystify Experiences

As you can imagine, the question that followed after learning the context of their schooling compared to those in wealthier neighborhoods was how could this have happened? Why were conditions at our school different than Richside High? To help them deconstruct their educational experience, we exposed the students to various literature and critical theories in education such as banking model of education and problem-posing pedagogy (Freire 1970), subtractive schooling (Valenzuela 1999), traditional and organic intellectuals (Gramsci 1971), social reproduction theory (Macleod 1995), and community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005). Engaging with Freire, Valenzuela, and Macleod, the students started to understand that their schooling experience was a result of power relations that maintained the status quo. In Macleod's social reproduction theory, he argued that schools were devised to reproduce the social hierarchy that we see in society with the few elite at top and the masses at the bottom.

Throughout the whole year, I kept on hearing Emma refer back to concept of social hierarchy and how they needed to change that reality. The student researchers started to understand that social reproduction was a cycle of oppression that was evident in their own schooling experiences.

Valenzuela's (1999) concept of subtractive schooling, on the other hand, further explained how the schooling process perpetuated the reality that if one wanted to succeed academically they had to give up parts of their cultural identity and acculturate into the dominant culture. It was through this piece of literature that the students began to uncover the roots of deficit perspectives of communities of color, specifically Latina/os. The student researchers already knew that the broader society thought deficitly about them and other youth living in urban areas, but through this process they were challenged to actually deconstruct those deficit perspectives and start to understand where they emanated from. Although all of these theories helped them understand their schooling condition much better, the one theory that spoke to the Panther student-researchers the most was community cultural wealth. They were interested in this theory because they admired the way in which Yosso transformed the deficit perspective put on communities of color and their cultures.

Broader society, media, and even educational literature (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) have led us to believe that communities of color were lacking the cultural capital that can be exchanged for better education and overall way of life. However, in rebuttal, Yosso argued that communities of color needed to recognize and better utilize their "cultural wealth"—the aspects of their culture that helped them survive, address, and at times transform their lived realities.

As an activity to help them prepare for their upcoming presentation at the Labor Center, we had the students make sense of the various community cultural wealth Yosso wrote about by having them explain each one in their own words and represent them on their PowerPoint slides. For this activity, we had them first read the description that Yosso provided for each community cultural wealth and then we had them free write what they thought each one meant. Then as a group we reconvened and discussed each community cultural wealth. For the final step, after we made sure that everyone in our group, adults included, had a good grasp of the concepts, we divided up the six community cultural wealth between the five students, making them responsible for explaining at least one of them in their own words, giving an example of what the concept meant, and representing them on a PowerPoint slide (Figure 4.3). Let us now take a glimpse into how they presented Yosso's theory at the FSP Labor Center Presentations.

Fernando: So, aspirational capital is having the ability to keep dreaming and hoping for the future even when facing obstacles. I relate to this capital because my parents don't have a college degree. So, my parents want us not to struggle and have a better life and go to college. So, they believe that I can make a difference by going to college and they hope that I will come back to my community and help. And prove that roses can grow from the concrete.

Sasha: Social capital is networks of people and community resources that can provide both instrumental and emotional support to help students navigate society's institutions. Like when I need help filling out a job application, I can just go to my friends and family. And when I need help filling out college applications and financial aid, I went to my teachers and counselors and was able to get the educational and financial support I needed for my decisions.

Ryan: Another capital that Yosso came up with was linguistic capital. Linguistic capital is the ability to switch languages in different contexts. You can relate the word linguistic to the Spanish word *lengua* which is tongue involving language. An example of this would be me presenting to a professional conference and then switching my language when speaking to friends and family members, giving me the ability to switch languages in different contexts.

Aspirational Capital

- The ability to keep hoping and dreaming for your future even when you face obstacles



Social Capital

- The peers and other social contacts that provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions.



Linguistic Capital

- The ability to switch language in different contexts.



Familial Capital

- Cultural knowledge's nurtured among familia that carry a sense of community history, memory and cultural intuition.



Navigational Capital

- Knowledge of the way people maneuver through communities and social institutions that weren't created for them.



Resistance Capital

- + Knowledge's and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality



Figure 4.3

Karina: Familial capital are people that you can relate to that is family or people in the community that you can trust and get need help from whenever you have a problem. So, let's say that one day I don't have food in my house, I can go to one of my group members and let them know what went wrong.

Navigational capital is knowing how to navigate through your own community as well as other communities that weren't created for us. Everyone from FSP comes from different communities and we know how to get to and from UCLA. And UCLA is located in Westwood that wasn't created for people of color.

Emma: Resistance capital. Resistance represents students having the knowledge and skills to challenge inequality. An example of that was the walkout. During this time many of our teachers were being threatened to be laid off. And we the students were upset because they always take our voices for granted. So, we decided to come up with a walkout since they decided not to listen to us. But thankfully, through the walkout, they listened to us and many of our teachers were saved.

All these types of various capitals relate to our research in that we must receive a meaningful education by receiving an education...that draws connections to our daily lives and taps into the various capitals that us students bring into the classroom.

In this first slide of aspirational capital, Fernando talked about being the first one in his family to go to college. Although immigrating to the U.S. was a difficult process for his parents, they had nothing but high hopes and dreams for Fernando to go to college and make a difference in this world just like many other immigrant parents that come to this country. Fernando's concept of aspiration was embedded in the notion of his family's *belief* that he would take advantage of the opportunities this country has to offer. Fernando's concept of aspirational capital goes hand in hand with Karina's understanding of familial capital—"cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition." I envision familial capital as the soul of communities of color. Like Karina alluded to, familial capital represents the counter-narratives of survival and beautiful histories of communities of color in the midst of colonization and legacy of oppression. Our families are living proof of the struggle and like Fernando explained, the history and support of his parents was integral to him

accomplishing his life goals. Yosso provided a lens for these students, making these concepts of belief and aspiration as traits that were valuable to the survival and success of communities of color. On the flipside, the students were demystifying deficit perceptions put on their families and their culture as well by understanding the importance of family bond and community struggle in a dominant society that pushes the ideal of individuality. By the end of this study, both Fernando and Karina knew that it took community to succeed as an individual and to create social change.

Relating social capital to aspirations, Sasha did well in explaining that in dreaming one has to utilize and recognize “the networks of people and community resources” available to help them navigate social institutions like school. In surveying the social capitals that she had in her life, Sasha identified the groups of people that were integral to helping her in navigating the college application process. Therefore, through this activity Sasha learned the very important skill of surveying the various resources and people that could help her in her endeavors. Equally as important and directly connected to social capital was Karina’s concept of navigational capital. Just as networks of people are integral to navigating institutions, Karina also pointed out that navigational capital was the ability to “navigate through your own community as well as other communities that weren’t created for [communities of color].” Her perspective of this capital was fascinating in that she related it to how students in FSP had the capacity to navigate multiple environments, their own communities and other communities and institutions that were not designed to accommodate or even welcome people of color. In her perspective, although she considered the university to be one of those spaces, she was proud that she learned how to navigate her way to it and through it. Yosso’s concepts of social and navigational capital were important to these students sense of agency in that they were pushed to identify the resources

they had at their disposal while making them understand they also had to develop the intuition and skills in navigating different social terrains.

The next community cultural wealth that Ryan presented that evening was linguistic capital. This specific capital really resonated with Ryan because when he was learning the concept I taught him the concept of code switching which I learned about in the academy. What I have learned from many of my Chicana/o colleagues is that code-switching was an important aspect of their professional repertoire and something that was vital to their cultural identity. This concept of code switching as I had learned it was as Ryan described having the ability to speak languages according to the social environment and context that one was in. Therefore, this talks to the benefit of communities of color being multi-lingual. In a country where traditionally people are shunned if they do not speak correct English vernacular, this community capital reverses that deficit perspective and celebrates the beauty of other languages and the ability of people of color to engage in different social environments. Ryan illustrated his point on his slide by showing that young men of color like the ones on his slide have the ability to engage in multiple environments, the left picture showing an emcee performing at a concert while the right picture shows one of his colleagues presenting to Council members and representatives of the Los Angeles mayor about his research. Ryan's choice of images was powerful in that it showed that young men of color have the ability to engage in multiple situations. Additionally, Ryan challenged the all too common stereotype and common depiction in mainstream media that the only successful career paths for Black males are in music and in sports; in this case, he made sure that he depicted Black males as intellectuals and civic leaders as well.

All in all, these five capitals embodied what Emma considered to be resistant capital. In the same light that her and her peers organized a walkout to protest budget cuts and teacher layoffs at their school and other schools in LAUSD, I feel their work in FSP equally represented Yosso's concept of resistant capital. On her slide, Emma defined resistant capital as "knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality." There is no doubt that learning critical social and educational theories and conducting YPAR represented what Yosso refers to as resistant capital. They do all of these things to challenge the inequality that they see and experience in their school and neighborhood. These processes of building skills and their critical consciousness have become tools for their agency. Along these lines, Cammarota and Fine (2008) wrote,

Once a young person discovers his or her capacity to effect change, oppressive systems and subjugating discourses no longer persuade him or her that the deep social and economic problems he or she faces result from his or her own volition. Rather, the discovery humanizes the individual, allowing him or her to realize the equal capabilities and universal intelligence in all humans, while acknowledging the existence of problems as the result of social forces beyond his or her own doing (pp. 6-7).

Being exposed to these theories, the students realized that it was not their fault the conditions at their school were the way that they were and why people thought negatively about them. Cammarota and Fine refer to this as the humanizing aspect of the YPAR process. I see it also as a process of radical healing, as Ginwright (2010) would call it, because students developed their self-efficacy and removed that deficit stigma that had been put on them. And through this healing process, the students understood their capabilities to take power into their own hands and advocate for change.

I think it is important to be explicit that what we do in FSP political education. Before I thought the concept of being politicized meant learning about the inner workings of the political

system. But as I kept on doing this work with FSP, I started to understand that becoming politicized meant much more than being engaged in governmental and civic affairs. It meant knowing the political landscape and understanding where you fit within the power structures of your society and how you can contribute to social progress. In an interview, Emma talked about how doing research was empowering and how the process debunked deficit notions of urban youth.

[Conducting research] is important because many people take us young people for granted. You know they're just kids, they don't know much about life. It's good to conduct research to prove them wrong. Because it shows that we actually do know what's going on. And because we the students live in the area and live in the community, we know what's going on.

Therefore, for the students, being engaged in YPAR was a political learning experience in that they were starting to understand “what [was] going on” in their community while beginning to think about the relationships between agency and structure. Although the broader society had a deficit perception of low-income communities of color, Yosso's community cultural wealth theory became a tool to help them see the cultural capital that their communities actually do possess. This is important in that most of the time communities of color are depicted of being barren wastelands of social toxins and inopportunities. However, with Yosso's guidance the students started to see that there is much to celebrate about their culture and history of Black and Brown people in South Los Angeles. To them, Yosso was an example of a scholar and community member that was challenging the power structures in play. And with her assistance they were unlearning, as Carter G. Woodson would describe it, their miseducation and developing a new critical lens to understand their world. Ultimately, learning about community cultural wealth and the other critical theories provided them with the language and concepts to

understand and better articulate their lived experiences while giving them the knowledge to strategize against and resist deficit perceptions.

Using Statistics to Contextualize Their Observations

As mentioned earlier, an important part of these YPAR projects was the ability to use a mixed method approach to gathering data. Therefore, as part of their quantitative approach, the students learned how to analyze statistics from existing databases. When students started to question the differences in academic performance and demographics of schools in urban communities compared to wealthier communities, we exposed the students to various databases that could help them demystify these differences. During one of our earlier sessions at the beginning of the year, Mr. Derrick, Mr. York and I took the time to introduce several existing databases that would provide such information such as existing databases from the U.S. Census Bureau, the California Department of Education, and the Education Data Partnership. However, the database that the students turned to most frequently was UCLA's Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (IDEA) California Educational Opportunity Database (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, n.d.).

This database aggregated data about individual high schools and middle schools in California, regarding demographics, availability of rigorous coursework and qualified teachers, as well as No Child Left Behind compliance. The one statistic though that the student researchers focused in on was the college opportunity ratio (COR)—“a 3-number figure that reports how many students graduate and how many pass the A-G courses required for admission to CSU and UC compared to each 100 students enrolled as 9th graders four years before.” The students were interested in this statistic because it showed them the proportions of students who graduated from high school with minimum requirements and those who graduate ready for college at their school

and other schools. For example, for the class of 2009 the COR for Panther High School was 100:41:15, meaning out of every one hundred students that entered Panther High School as freshman, only forty percent of them graduated and fifteen percent were college eligible. First of all, we have to recognize that the graduation rate of Panther High School did increase from what it was before in 2007 when the rate was only twenty two percent. However, when more than half of the freshman class still did not make it to graduation day and only fifteen percent were college eligible, it raised red flags for the students. This led them to question, what about their school was preventing students from graduating and going to college? What did access to learning resources at their school have to do with this grim reality that the COR painted?

To further their analysis, the students looked up the COR for the other schools that they visited to compare to their own. Figure 4.4 shows a bar graph that the students designed illustrating the differences between the college opportunity ratios of three urban schools (including Innercity and Panther) and Richside High School. Deducing from their observations and analysis of the different COR, they started to develop the argument that, because of insufficient learning resources and uninviting learning environments, college access and eligibility were drastically different for urban high schools compared to wealthier schools. As the graph indicates, less than thirty-five percent of students at the urban high schools ended up graduating compared to ninety-five percent at the more advantaged school. These were stark differences and the reality that the student researchers were uncovering resembled what Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) referred to as the educational debt. Echoing Ladson-Billings and having the documentation to prove it, the students argued that the lack of investment in their school and others like theirs resulted in the achievement gap that was illustrated on their graph.

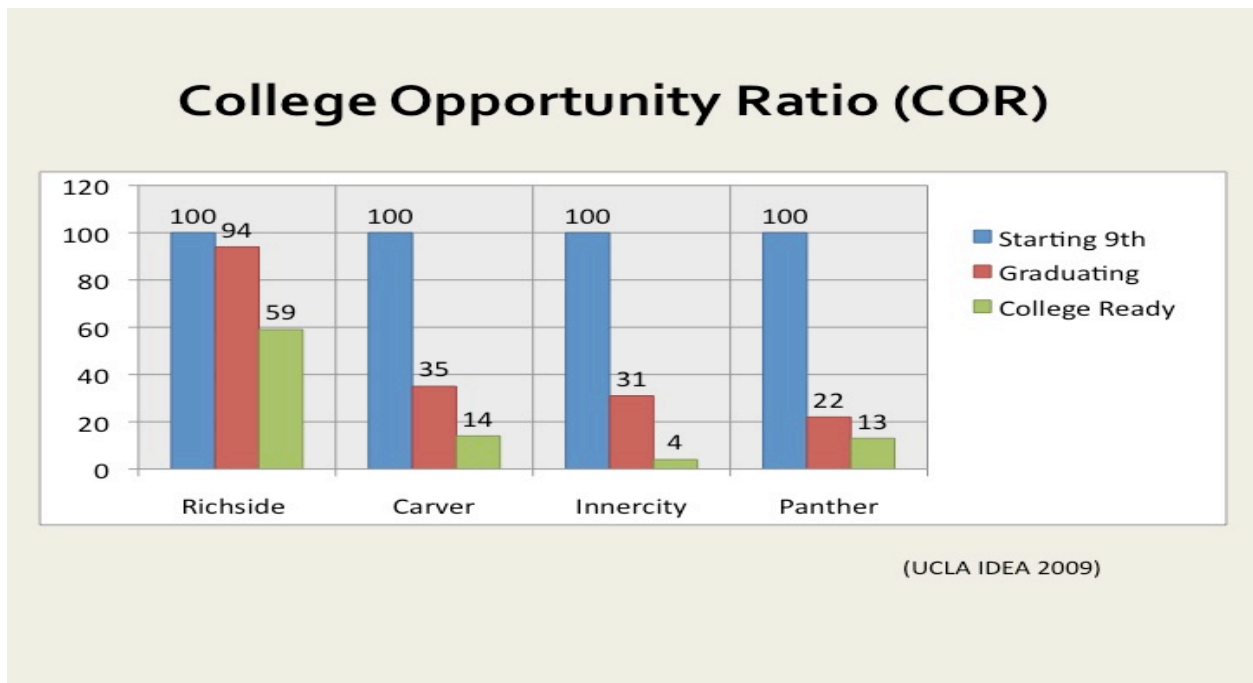


Figure 4.4

The students' readings of statistical data gave them concrete research to contextualize their observations and everyday experiences. The COR of Panther High were not just numbers, it represented their lived experience. If you look at the California Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (2010), we can see that the students fulfilled some of the Statistics and Probability content standards by engaging in this activity (refer to Statistics and Probability Standards, Figure 4.5). For example, out of the nine Statistics and Probability standards shown in the figure, this research activity addressed three of them. The first standard that was applicable to this exercise was "make inferences and justify conclusions from sample surveys, experiments, and observational studies." In relating statistics such as the COR to their participant observations and interviews, the students related the low COR to the lack of resources at their school. And they argued that if this situation were not addressed then the reality will lead to the demise of future Panther graduates. In all actuality, when the students did make claims of these

causal relationships, they also talked to two other standards: “understand independence and conditional probability and use them to interpret data” and “use probability to evaluate outcomes of decisions.” Their research talked directly to these two standards in that they could imagine future outcomes at each of the respective schools they were studying. Although these exercises were not focused on the actual mathematical processes and calculations taught in the actual course, I feel that with imagination and creativity that a statistics instructor can develop actual equations that relate to the work the Panther students were doing.

Overall, these statistical exercises were all part of the core research skills that we intended the students to learn. However, these statistics meant more than numbers to these youth in that they represented their actual calculated educational opportunity. Although their graph of the various COR appeared simple, it told the students a story that helped them further deconstruct the social and political dynamics of their education. The social implications of the COR comparison showed that youth in urban areas had dramatically less of a chance to go to college. Additionally, the political dimensions of the situation showed that, even seven years after the Williams decision, the state government had yet to figure out how to minimize and truly address the educational debt (Ladson-Billings 2006) in California. Therefore, these activities proved to be a relevant learning experience for these students and once again helped shape their development as informed agents of their community.

Statistics and Probability

Interpreting Categorical and Quantitative Data

S-ID

Summarize, represent, and interpret data on a single count or measurement variable

1. Represent data with plots on the real number line (dot plots, histograms, and box plots).
2. Use statistics appropriate to the shape of the data distribution to compare center (median, mean) and spread (interquartile range, standard deviation) of two or more different data sets.
3. Interpret differences in shape, center, and spread in the context of the data sets, accounting for possible effects of extreme data points (outliers).
4. Use the mean and standard deviation of a data set to fit it to a normal distribution and to estimate population percentages. Recognize that there are data sets for which such a procedure is not appropriate. Use calculators, spreadsheets, and tables to estimate areas under the normal curve.

Summarize, represent, and interpret data on two categorical and quantitative variables

5. Summarize categorical data for two categories in two-way frequency tables. Interpret relative frequencies in the context of the data (including joint, marginal, and conditional relative frequencies). Recognize possible associations and trends in the data.
6. Represent data on two quantitative variables on a scatter plot, and describe how the variables are related.
 - a. Fit a function to the data; use functions fitted to data to solve problems in the context of the data. *Use given functions or choose a function suggested by the context. Emphasize linear, quadratic, and exponential models.*
 - b. Informally assess the fit of a function by plotting and analyzing residuals.
 - c. Fit a linear function for a scatter plot that suggests a linear association.

Interpret linear models

7. Interpret the slope (rate of change) and the intercept (constant term) of a linear model in the context of the data.
8. Compute (using technology) and interpret the correlation coefficient of a linear fit.
9. Distinguish between correlation and causation.

Making Inferences and Justifying Conclusions

S-IC

Understand and evaluate random processes underlying statistical experiments

1. Understand statistics as a process for making inferences about population parameters based on a random sample from that population.
2. Decide if a specified model is consistent with results from a given data-generating process, e.g., using simulation. *For example, a model says a spinning coin falls heads up with probability 0.5. Would a result of 5 tails in a row cause you to question the model?*

Make inferences and justify conclusions from sample surveys, experiments, and observational studies

3. Recognize the purposes of and differences among sample surveys, experiments, and observational studies; explain how randomization relates to each.
4. Use data from a sample survey to estimate a population mean or proportion; develop a margin of error through the use of simulation models for random sampling.
5. Use data from a randomized experiment to compare two treatments; use simulations to decide if differences between parameters are significant.
6. Evaluate reports based on data.

Conditional Probability and the Rules of Probability**S-CP****Understand independence and conditional probability and use them to interpret data**

1. Describe events as subsets of a sample space (the set of outcomes) using characteristics (or categories) of the outcomes, or as unions, intersections, or complements of other events ("or," "and," "not").
2. Understand that two events A and B are independent if the probability of A and B occurring together is the product of their probabilities, and use this characterization to determine if they are independent.
3. Understand the conditional probability of A given B as $P(A \text{ and } B)/P(B)$, and interpret independence of A and B as saying that the conditional probability of A given B is the same as the probability of A , and the conditional probability of B given A is the same as the probability of B .
4. Construct and interpret two-way frequency tables of data when two categories are associated with each object being classified. Use the two-way table as a sample space to decide if events are independent and to approximate conditional probabilities. *For example, collect data from a random sample of students in your school on their favorite subject among math, science, and English. Estimate the probability that a randomly selected student from your school will favor science given that the student is in tenth grade. Do the same for other subjects and compare the results.*
5. Recognize and explain the concepts of conditional probability and independence in everyday language and everyday situations. *For example, compare the chance of having lung cancer if you are a smoker with the chance of being a smoker if you have lung cancer.*

Use the rules of probability to compute probabilities of compound events in a uniform probability model

6. Find the conditional probability of A given B as the fraction of B 's outcomes that also belong to A , and interpret the answer in terms of the model.
7. Apply the Addition Rule, $P(A \text{ or } B) = P(A) + P(B) - P(A \text{ and } B)$, and interpret the answer in terms of the model.
8. (+) Apply the general Multiplication Rule in a uniform probability model, $P(A \text{ and } B) = P(A)P(B|A) = P(B)P(A|B)$, and interpret the answer in terms of the model.
9. (+) Use permutations and combinations to compute probabilities of compound events and solve problems.

Using Probability to Make Decisions**S-MD****Calculate expected values and use them to solve problems**

1. (+) Define a random variable for a quantity of interest by assigning a numerical value to each event in a sample space; graph the corresponding probability distribution using the same graphical displays as for data distributions.
2. (+) Calculate the expected value of a random variable; interpret it as the mean of the probability distribution.
3. (+) Develop a probability distribution for a random variable defined for a sample space in which theoretical probabilities can be calculated; find the expected value. *For example, find the theoretical probability distribution for the number of correct answers obtained by guessing on all five questions of a multiple-choice test where each question has four choices, and find the expected grade under various grading schemes.*
4. (+) Develop a probability distribution for a random variable defined for a sample space in which probabilities are assigned empirically; find the expected value. *For example, find a current data distribution on the number of TV sets per household in the United States, and calculate the expected number of sets per household. How many TV sets would you expect to find in 100 randomly selected households?*

Use probability to evaluate outcomes of decisions

5. (+) Weigh the possible outcomes of a decision by assigning probabilities to payoff values and finding expected values.
 - a. Find the expected payoff for a game of chance. *For example, find the expected winnings from a state lottery ticket or a game at a fast-food restaurant.*
 - b. Evaluate and compare strategies on the basis of expected values. *For example, compare a high-deductible versus a low-deductible automobile insurance policy using various, but reasonable, chances of having a minor or a major accident.*
6. (+) Use probabilities to make fair decisions (e.g., drawing by lots, using a random number generator).
7. (+) Analyze decisions and strategies using probability concepts (e.g. product testing, medical testing, pulling a hockey goalie at the end of a game).

Figure 4.5

The Pedagogical Value of Interviewing

Since they had their initial observations down and were able to make more sense of their situation using theories in education and statistical data, the next step for the students was interviewing the people who knew about learning resources at their school. One of the main tenets of YPAR is engaging the community and depending on indigenous knowledge to inform one's research project. Therefore, to start off their research project, the students brainstormed the stakeholders at their school that would provide them with information to answer their main research question. The first people that they wanted to interview were their peers. They wanted to collect their voices first because they knew, just like them, they were experts with the inside scoop about learning resources at Panther High School. Ultimately though, the actual activity of interviewing was an empowering, participatory learning process for the five FSP students. Overall, the FSP students were mainly interested in learning what their peers thought about their educational experience at Panther High School and what learning resources they felt were necessary to receive a high quality education.

As teachers of this after school class, we were always trying to find ways to have the students reflect on their process of doing research. Therefore, their earlier stages of data analysis presented itself as an opportunity to actually do just that. Working from a Freirein approach, we knew that reflection was critical to the development of the students' praxis of being researchers. So, as a pedagogical tool we came up with exercises to have them reflect on their research process whether it was through quick writes or brainstorming as a group. For example, after they did their first round of student interviews, we started to reflect and analyze the data that they collected thus far. It gave us time to collectively reflect on what they learned during those

interviews. Let me give you a glimpse into our world and how the students started to unravel the answers to their research question, pushing them to further define their research focus.

February 7, 2011

Since FSP is an afterschool program, usually all the chairs in Mr. Derrick's classroom are all turned over up on top of the desks from last period. And when the FSP students come in we just take a couple of chairs down and form a mini circle with a few of the desks. But today for some reason all the chairs were tucked in under the desks and the classroom had a more open environment. And instead of a circle we all huddled our desks in front of the projection screen where we could see the notes that I was taking on the computer. Today, I volunteered to be the note taker.

Everyone was sitting down patiently and intently, ready to engage. We had a packed schedule and a lot of things to go over in a span of two hours. First item on the agenda was 1) REFLECTING ON STUDENT INTERVIEWS. I had my Word document up and I was ready to take notes.

The students whipped out their notes and took turns sharing what they remembered from the interviews with students from their school. This is one of the first times that I noticed that they were acting like expert researchers. Similar to the ways in which my colleagues and I reflect on our research findings and try to make sense of our findings as we co-write and co-construct scholarly journal articles, the students also engage in these type of research practices. It was as if reflecting on their interviews had become second nature to them already. So, we went right to it.

One of the first topics that came up was that of teacher pedagogy. When the FSP students asked their peers about what they thought about their education most of them talked about their experiences in their classes.

Sasha starts the conversation out, "They only like the classes where they have the work that is relevant to them."

Fernando added, "[They say] teachers are caring.

"[They like] what they are teaching about. And how they attract students."

I pushed Sasha and Fernando a bit further to explain their answers more. "What are they teaching about," I asked.

Sasha replied, "About the things that relate to the students."

Fernando agreed, "They connect the lectures to the students."

And then Karina jumped in the conversation with her semi-whispered two cents, “like culturally relevant.”

Mr. Derrick nodded in agreement and delight, “Yeah you got it—culturally relevant. Fernando, what else do your notes say?”

“Well [one student] was saying that Social Justice Academy² teachers were interesting. In lectures they don’t just teach them, they discuss things as a group.”

Ryan, breaking from his silence for the first time today said with a smile, “What do you call that? Problem-posing, right?” He smiled because he knew he was connecting a theory to the experience. Sasha and I both nodded and smiled to agree with Ryan.

Finishing his remarks, Fernando inserted, “and almost all the students said that they needed better technology.”

For my note taking purposes, I had to clarify, “Wait all students said that?!”

Fernando replied, “Yeah.”

Our conversation that started out about what the students liked about learning and their teachers’ pedagogy, then started to turn into a deeper conversation about access to technology. About five minutes later into our reflection, Mr. Derrick tried to summarize what he was hearing from the students. “So, we get to see that this theme of technology is coming up. The idea that students have access to laptops and computers.”

Sasha interjected suddenly with a story to tell. “Yeah that happened today. Like the yearbook editor, she needed a laptop to finish it. And [the yearbook teacher] wasn’t here. So, she was like going around looking for laptops...And she was about to cry because she didn’t have a laptop.”

Affirming her story, Mr. Derrick said, “So a class that relies on technology like the yearbook class doesn’t have a laptop available. That’s an issue, right? When we think about what’s supposed to be essential.” Trying to connect it to other instances, he remarks, “Like in this [FSP] class a laptop is essential. Like peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Without peanut butter you’re like damn.” We all laughed a little.

Looking over the last part of his notes, Fernando ended our reflection with, “[Malika] was also saying that they go over the same stuff. Over and over like slavery. And they’re like tired of hearing about slavery. She said that there is like only one section talking about Black people and the rest of the book is about white people. But she wants to know more about tribes from her homeland. She kinda got loud when she said that and the kids

² One of the four learning academies at Panther High School

standing outside of the room clapped.” We all laughed together because we could picture the student interviewee, Malika, talking with conviction and students applauding her.

Mr. Derrick asked to clarify, “Because they were feeling her, right?”

Fernando answered, “Yeah. I think she even said that they need to provide students with laptops.” From that point the students started to discuss amongst themselves how one teacher in the school had access to Mac iPads that they received from a grant. Their side-talk concluded with agreement that these types of resources were few and not many students had access to them.

After feeling the students had exhausted what they had remembered, Mr. Derrick tried once again to bring it all together. “So, I think what we’re finding here is at least with material resources. What I’m hearing from you guys is that technology is very important. We don’t have enough [technology] but what we do have is not good enough. Right? And in terms of the textbooks and what we saw from Malika’s interview is that the textbooks are not relevant. There is not enough buy in to wanting to learn. What I’m hearing on the teachers end is that some teachers aren’t teaching, they’re teaching from the book.” Everyone nodded and agreed and we moved on to the next task on the agenda of planning out the adult interviews.

As professional researchers, when we analyze data we consider it a step to the process of doing research. But when we did it as a group as part of the YPAR methodology, it was more than just doing research. Both students and adults were learning together what the main concerns of Panther students were. Looking back into history, the research process, whether it was called that or not, was utilized by youth to understand what was going on in their community and environment and became the springboard for action. We have seen it with the Black Panther Party and how they used participant observations and talked to the community to know that police brutality was an issue in their community (Newton 1973). We have seen it with the Young Lords and how they surveyed the needs of the community in Spanish Harlem and found out that garbage piling up in their barrios was a pressing issue (Melendez 2003). They talked to the community, gained information, and sharpened their analysis of the situation further. Therefore, I envisioned the Panther students conducting interviews, surveying the community,

and using their observations as proof of the revolutionary work of youth today as they engage in actual scholarly research as their tool of investigation.

Group reflection proved to be a very effective activity in that it helped us narrow our understandings about their research. From their reflections, they pinpointed the two key ideas from their interviews that they felt were important to further investigate—1) lack of technological resources like laptops and 2) culturally insensitive and irrelevant teachers and textbooks. We will now talk about how these two concepts led them to further examination of these topics and ultimately, to their research claims and thesis.

Culturally irrelevant learning materials

When looking back at their interview transcriptions, two quotes around culturally irrelevant materials sparked the interest of the FSP students: “the only thing the history book mentions about Black culture is slavery” and “the history I know is about White culture, I don’t know about my culture!” The students took these quotes into consideration and used them as references in examining the textbooks that they had available to them. The first thing they thought about was what textbooks did they have that were culturally relevant and which ones were not? So, what they did was go straight to the U.S. History book that was used school wide and came to the conclusion that the students were correct. They found out that the only times Black people were mentioned in the book were in the sections about slavery and civil rights. Additionally, when they looked in chapter twenty-one which focused on the time period of 1992 to present day, they noticed important events that took place in their community like the 1992 L.A. rebellions (also known as the L.A. riots) was not covered. They concluded that their observations supported their analyses—textbooks focused predominantly on White culture and history and important events that were important to communities of color, like the rebellion,

were left out from their education. Therefore, from their findings they developed their first research claim:

[PANTHER] STUDENTS DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO CULTURALLY RELEVANT TEXTBOOKS, WHICH OFTEN LEADS TO DISENGAGEMENT BECAUSE THE MATERIAL DOES NOT VALUE THE EXPERIENCES OF THE STUDENT.

In triangulating their data sets, interviews with the students, database analysis, and participant observations, they started to understand the conditions going on at their school and the consequences of those circumstances. They understood that since students were not being provided with materials that were culturally relevant, it led students to disengage in their classes. And since they know from their database analyses that a high percentage of students were not graduating at their school, they made the case that irrelevant curriculum, curriculum that does not take into account the histories and experiences of students at Panther High, could be one of the major causes to student disengagement and attrition. This was an important aspect to note regarding the development of the FSP students' critical consciousness. Usually young people, specifically Black and Brown youth are blamed for their disengagement in school (Ogbu 1978; 1991). However, the students, through their research claim, resisted and rebutted the deficit perspectives put on youth of color. Instead, they argued that it was the institutions fault for not providing culturally relevant learning materials. It was from their dialogue with their peers that they found out that culturally relevant learning materials were what their peers were looking for in a high quality, challenging education.

Lack of up-to-date technology

The second issue that the students followed up on was accessibility to technology at Panther High School. In looking back at their interview time stamps³, one of the main quotes that stuck out to them about technology was “we should at least get better computers. I tried to go on the library computers and they were really slow.” Therefore, Fernando and Emma started to survey the technology that they had available to them, starting with the ones at the library. Figure 4.7 shows a photo that they used in one of their presentations, documenting the computers they had sitting in their school library. Out of the 16 computers that were available for the whole student body of 1600 students, only two were up-to-date. As we can see from Figure 4.8, another slide from one of their presentations, it shows that the older computers that were outdated for over ten years, equipped with Windows XP 2001 and a floppy disk drive. The computer hardware was obsolete. How is that supposed to prepare students to participate and be contributive citizens in the twentieth first century? In response, The FSP Panther students argued that it does not set them up to be college competitive. Instead, the student researchers argued that it was doing the opposite. It was setting them up to be illiterate—technologically illiterate.

³ Time stamping refers to the method used to remember important quotes from their interviews. The role and responsibility of the “time-stamper” during an interview was to record the times when interviewees said something note worthy up for review.

Interviews

- “We should at least get better computers, I tried to go on the library computers and they were *really* slow.”
-Student



2 new computers & 14 old computers in the library

Figure 4.6

Claim 1

- **Crenshaw students do not have access to updated technology, which leads many students to be technologically illiterate.**

Floppy Disk Drive

Windows XP (2001)



Figure 4.7

From these findings they developed their second research claim:

[PANTHER] STUDENTS DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO UPDATED TECHNOLOGY, WHICH LEADS MANY STUDENTS TO BE TECHNOLOGICALLY ILLITERATE.

The student researchers were making the point that access to updated technology was vital to receiving a high quality education. But what's most notable from their claim was collectively with their adult instructors they came up with the term, *technological illiteracy*. It was at this juncture in their research that I saw that they were at a certain level of intellectualism that pushed them to create their own terminology to name their condition.

This concept of technological illiteracy that the students put forth was ground breaking. Some scholars (Bugliarello 2000; Bybee 2000; Wonacott 2001) have talked about the importance of technological literacy but none have explored the detriments of being technologically "illiterate". Traditionally literacy has been defined as the ability to coherently read and write, but in today's advancement of technology and multi modalities of communicating (Hull and Zacher 2010) this definition of literacy was outdated. The students' concept of technological illiteracy uncovered a reality that youth from this urban area of Los Angeles do not have access to up-to-date technology which leads these students and their peers ill-prepared to participate in college and civic life. Let's be honest, we live in the information age and the power of people is and will continue to be measured by an individual or collectives' ability to control and wield the tools of technology. However, it was only through this YPAR process that the student researchers were able to articulate how they once again were being disadvantaged in the academic realm. Historically in this country, Black and Brown communities have been denied the education on how to read and write. Now as the students articulated, they are being denied access and the training on how to utilize and navigate modern methods of literacy.

In the literature on YPAR, each piece has talked about the process that the young researchers went through in conducting research but never has it been mentioned that the youth actually came up with theory. I have witnessed other youth in the FSP and other youth research

programs come up with theory for their projects, but no one has really written about this phenomenon. Their expertise around their educational experience at Panther High manifested itself into theory building. Delgado-Bernal (2002) talks about the importance of raced-gendered epistemologies, a “system of knowing” generated from and used within communities of color. She talked about these specific and unique epistemologies “as dynamic and encompassing of various experiences, standpoints, and theories specific to different groups of people of color (p. 113).” Therefore, this theory of technological illiteracy was specific to the experiences of students at Panther High. At a later time of reflection after the students presented at a national conference, Emma talked about this phenomenon of youth theory building from her standpoint.

You know how we read and studied all the theories...I mean all these theories are pretty much based on our experiences, and then we kind of put ourselves into that theory. I think we should create our own theories and have our own theories. And teach other students that you don't have to have this crazy name or you don't have to be this famous philosopher to have this theory. You know the theory starts with you because these theorists got their theories based on observations. And you know we have observations and we have experiences that can create a bigger theory than they do. So I think that's something that we can create to leave here as a mark and its also something that can go into a book...I think creating your own theory is something powerful. There's so many people out there that think they don't have the power to do that just because we have no degree, we don't even have a [college] degree. We're about to, but you don't need to be rich and famous to have some kind of power. So that's what I was thinking, you know make your own theory and make other students learn from that.

What Emma meant when she was talking about “creating a bigger theory” than the so-called professional researchers and educational theorists was that she felt that she and her research partners had gone through a formal learning process that had prepared them to develop theory that was grounded and specific to the experiences of Panther students. I would not argue that one theory of understanding schooling experiences, whether it was coming from young people or adults, was better or ‘bigger’ than another. However, I must point out that adult educational

researchers and the youth researchers both occupy important positionalities that help us develop a more cohesive and full picture of what is really going on in urban schools. Emma was correct in that they did not need a fancy degree to give them the right to create theories to deconstruct and name their worlds. Through YPAR, they had gathered the knowledge to make them experts of the situation going on at Panther High School. Therefore, they were not only learning and applying the critical theories in education to their experiences, but they were also developing their own language to understand their world.

Overall, the students interviewing their peers represented yet another moment in my research where they were developing their understanding of agency and structure in that they were pinpointing the instances where the schooling structure was the actual perpetrator for students being disengaged at Panther High. But as a response to what they learned from their data, they collectively came up with the term technological illiteracy with their adult allies and implemented it into their research claims as a poignant critique of the educational system. In result, they were finding ways to be critical of the social institution that they were a part of while learning new ways to enact their agency through research. Additionally in answering one of my main research questions, they were also using their research as a pedagogical tool to 1) teach their peers about the program that they were involved in and what they were studying while 2) learning from their peers about the most pressing issues regarding learning resources at their school. At its essence these interactions represented an exchange of ideas where everyone was learning from one another and validating each other's experiences.

Development of Research Thesis

After collecting and analyzing their data, their journey led them to the development of their research thesis.

We argue, that at Crenshaw High School, students do not have access to quality technology and culturally relevant textbooks.

Which means:

Not being prepared & eligible for college.

Not able to survive college.

Not being able to contribute to the wellbeing of our community.

Their thesis was very telling of the sense of agency that they developed over time. For starters, their thesis showed that they were genuinely concerned about the type of education that they were receiving because they wanted to go to college and “survive.” They debunked the common misconception that young people in urban areas do not care about their education. These five student researchers learned for themselves and brilliantly argued that it was not their fault that students at their school were not academically achieving. The structure of their school and social and political factors out of their control were to blame for the inequalities in their education; Panther High School was ill equipped to handle and address all the academic and personal needs of their student body. And simply put, they challenged the policies and recommendations of the *Williams* settlement that still fell short of addressing the real issues going on in urban schools in California. That being said, it was safe to conclude that even the state government could not have done a better job at developing such an inquiry that yielded the type of information that the students gathered. This consciousness raising through YPAR proved to be an effective learning tool in that it not only academically challenged these students but it heightened their awareness and self-efficacy.

Outside of their own academic trajectories though and their awareness of their own power, their research thesis also showed their concern for the well being of their peers and their community. The development of their critical consciousness pushed these five students to think outside of the conformist resistance ideologies. Rather the YPAR process pushed them to

understand and move towards transformative resistance that would help bring about social change and not just individual achievement. Therefore, the development of critical consciousness was not just an individual process, but rather also a process that was brought forth through collective struggle. That is where the true nature and power of YPAR lies. YPAR was not an individual research task, but rather a collective process and investigation that pushed for collective awareness and community development.

Overall, this process of conducting YPAR at their school has made these five students critical of their environment and lived condition. There have been numerous times throughout the year that I have heard Fernando, Ryan, and Sasha express that before participating in FSP they did not see the inequitable conditions that they were experiencing at their school. They thought their education was unproblematic. It was not until they went through the research process of observing and investigating the conditions of schools around the area did they start to understand that not all public schools were the same. From their investigative research and what they have seen with their very own eyes, they gained 1) the knowledge to deconstruct their experience at Panther High School in comparison to other schools and 2) the ability to name the inequitable conditions that they were experiencing at their school. The whole process of developing one's critical consciousness was integral to the students' sense of agency—a type of agency that can lead to transformational resistance and pushes for social justice. In the second half of this chapter, we explore how the development of their critical consciousness led them to their actions of actually addressing the issues that they researched.

PART II. Transformative Actions of Presenting

One of the tenets of PAR that separates it from other research methods is the move towards collective or individual action to address the issue being studied (McIntyre 2000). In this instance, the action the student researchers took up was presenting their research findings to various audiences throughout the school year; they presented their research findings to their peers at Panther High School, to community folks and local educators at the UCLA Labor Center, and to educators and researchers from all over the country at an annual national educational conference. For all three of these events, the students developed presentations showcasing their research process and their findings. Additionally, what was powerful about these presentations was the students used it as platforms to not only show folks what they accomplished, but to teach audience members their lived experience as students at Panther High School. At the end of their presentations they challenged their audience to act in solidarity with them in addressing and transforming the conditions they were facing on the daily. As you could imagine, each presentation was different in that the Panther students approached each audience in a specific manner, thinking about the ways that they could best engage each one. Additionally, they came up with specific, as we call it, “marching orders” for each group.

Speaking from the Heart: Embedding Narratives in the Research

Our motto this past year was “don’t just be heard, be felt” or “speak from the heart.” After the interviews, I came to understand that the students internalized this “mantra” when it came to presenting their research findings to others. Over the past couple of years in participating in FSP, Mr. Derrick and I always found time to reflect on our practice and pedagogy of working with our students. After every summer seminar and after every school year we would make a list of pluses and deltas about our experience of facilitating the learning

process of our students. There is no doubt that having engaged in FSP for the past three plus we both have honed our skills of helping students develop critical and informative research projects. This reflection process was integral in making our pedagogies more effective. That being the case, one of the main self-critiques that seemed to come up multiple times in our conversations over the past couple of years was that, although we were teaching all of our students how to be great researchers, there were times where they could have been more effective in the ways that they presented their research. We felt that they comprehended their research topic and findings very well and could talk about it like we do at the university. Many would argue that being able to break down research and communicate in the language of academia was powerful; witnessing all of our students develop the ability speak in academic language was definitely empowering. However, we did not just want them to replicate traditional and many times deficit educational research projects that were disconnected from their existential experiences as students. At times we felt that this was what was missing from their presentations—their experiences as students attending the schools that they were researching. From this realization, Mr. Derrick and I vowed to make sure that our students not only developed the research skills and language, but that they also gained the confidence and swagger to talk about their experiences with conviction and integrate it into their research projects and presentations.

The students internalized this motto as “coming from the heart.” To them, coming from the heart really meant telling their narrative and having their audience feel their pains, triumphs, and struggles through their presentation. I see this concept of being passionate and speaking from experience as part of the students’ pedagogies of teaching their audience. All in all, the students’ sense of agency was embodied in these skills, literacies, and approaches to presenting and teaching about their research findings. In this next section I will venture into the three

different presentations and provide an analysis of the things that I witnessed and learned from these five students' moves towards action.

Presentation 1: Peer Pressure and Empowerment

Out of all three presentations that the students did all year, I think their presentation at Panther High was the most important because the five student researchers had the chance to really expose their peers to what they actually were doing in FSP. Since this presentation occurred earlier in the school year, our research project as a group was barely getting under way for the academic school year. Therefore, the Panther students presented on the research projects that they did during the FSP summer seminar. During the summer seminar, the Panther students were split up into five different groups so they could work with the other high school students in FSP. Each project focused on different aspects of education as they related to the *Williams* case: such as school environment, qualified teachers, adequate learning resources, engaging curriculum, and school leadership. So, what the Panther students were presenting that afternoon to their peers were condensed versions of their summer research projects, the documentaries made for those projects, their recommendations for their peers, and lastly what they learned from the whole experience of conducting research and being in FSP.

The main thing that I paid close attention to that afternoon was their different approaches to engaging their peers. The Panther students had two objectives in mind going about these presentations: the first was to expose their peers to different ideas and concepts that they researched while telling their peers how this process changed their lives and their outlook.

Talking about the process of doing research

That afternoon, before they went into each individual presentation, the group started with a description of their process of doing research and what they were studying.

Sasha: This year our research was based on the *Williams* case, which was a class action law suit by the schools of California against the state because they had received the bare minimum of instructional materials and they had unsafe and unhealthy school facilities and did not have qualified teachers. In 2004, the case was settled and it provided schools with adequate learning resources and qualified teachers, and clean and safe learning facilities. Our main research question was, after ten years after the *Williams* case, how have our schools changed?

Ryan: In our research we used two types of methods, qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative has the word quality in it. So, we used video cameras and did live interviews. And quantitative means an amount, so we did surveys. And we also used philosophers and theorists like Freire. (At this point, since it was Brian's first presentation of the year, he was a little rusty at presenting and not as prepared as previous events. But Karina backed him up by picking up from where he left off.)

Karina: In the theory of Freire, it was the banking concept which means that the teachers just gives information and doesn't let the student talk. And problem-posing, that's the opposite. You know how some teachers interact and we learn together.

Let me first start with an examination of how Sasha introduced the *Williams* case. In my field notes I found it powerful to see the Panther students in the audience were being exposed to the *Williams* case and how it impacted their educational experience. This topic was relevant to their lives and what went on at their school whether they were aware of it or not. According to Mr. Derrick, every school year a "*Williams* representative" shows up to the school to make sure that it was in compliance to the *Williams* settlement. However, Mr. Derrick also clued me in to the fact that the school administration planned for these days; they staged the school so that they would pass the evaluation, meaning bookshelves in each classroom were fully stocked, the whole school was extra clean, and they made sure that everything from classroom doors and windows were fully functioning. But surprising enough, through all this hoopla, the students may have not

recognized this event because to them it was business as usual and not much of their education had changed because of an annual facelift to the school façade. Therefore, the mission of the Panther High students was vital in that they were contextualizing a class action lawsuit that happened more than a decade ago to the current lives of these students.

Following a description of the *Williams* case, Ryan tried his best to describe the research process to his fellow peers. Although it was not as smooth as he would have liked, it was the first time for many of the students to hear about this concept of research. Just like they were first introduced to research during their high school years, the Panther student researchers were exposing their peers to the concept of research as well. From Ryan's few talking points, the students in the audience might have not fully understood the whole concept of doing research at the moment. But the mere fact that their five peers were showing them what they had done proved that this skill and knowledge was accessible to people their age.

Another aspect of their introduction that I would like to focus on is the way Karina picked up where Ryan had a difficult time explaining the different theorists they studied such as Freire. Improvising, Karina tried her best to explain Freire's theories of the banking model of education and problem-posing pedagogy. Although her presentation of Freire's ideas could have been more polished, for her to remember the terms "banking concept" and "problem-posing" meant she internalized those concepts. And being around these youth over a year's time, I know they internalized these concepts because when they ever talked about a teacher not listening or just giving bookwork instead of facilitating an engaging curriculum they referred to that learning as "banking." "They're banking on me," they would say to one another. Therefore, although these terms and concepts were from highly theoretical pieces of literature, they became part of their vocabulary and the Panther student researchers were able to use it in their everyday speech

as seen here in their presentation. This proves that, although these theories were complex, the students remembered them because they were relevant to their educational experiences. In this next part, I will go into the unique ways that the Panther presenters taught their peers about their projects and engaged them in the process.

Using multimedia to engage

On the projector screen the question flashes, “To what are all students entitled?”

The voice of one of the teachers that they interviewed speaks over the random images of students of color walking up the steps to school, a track and field well managed, a trophy case filled with dozens of trophies won over the years, and students using computers in a library. “Students, not should be, they are entitled to an environment that makes them feel safe, an environment that makes them feel comfortable, an environment that makes them feel human.”

The scenes then jump to another one of their teacher interviewees. “If you think about this concept of social reproduction, what are the gates? Like you go to some schools there are no gates right? So, what are the gates really for?” Images that the student researchers took during their field days of gates and fences that surround some schools pop up. “And why are they only in certain communities? But it’s everywhere in the aesthetic of South Central, South L.A. There are guards and bars everywhere. Where else are there bars, right? In prisons.”

Another teacher from East Los Angeles comes on the screen continuing the critique. “There are some schools that feel more like prisons and look more like prisons than they do schools.” More images of gated schools fill the screen.

“Gompers is gated.” The word “GATED!” flashes on top of the screen. “Drew is gated.” Another time across the screen—GATED! GATED! “Brett Heart is gated.” GATED! GATED! GATED! “Even the elementary schools are gated.” One last time but in larger font than the ones before it, GATED!!

Directly after a community member chimes in on the issue. “Just think if someone put a gate around your house. You would feel the difference. You would feel like a caged animal versus being free.”

The screen then flips to the boys’ basketball coach from one of the local high schools. “It feels like we are in jail a lot of the time. That’s a real thing.” The word JAIL pops on the left hand corner of the screen.

This part of the documentary ends with comments from the teacher at the beginning who was talking about what students are entitled to. “It’s difficult to be in a learning “mind set” when you physically feel imprisoned or institutionalized.”

This snippet was part of Fernando’s documentary that he showed that afternoon. As part of their presentations, the students also showed the documentaries that they created over the summer. Aside from developing PowerPoint presentations during the summer seminar, in FSP the students also created documentaries, putting together all the interviews they conducted, their participant observations, and the photographs and b-roll they took during their field days. Fernando’s presentation was about the social and physical ecologies of schools. “Social ecology is the study of how organisms interact with each other. For example the way you interact with your teachers. And physical ecology is the study of how organisms interact with non-living factors like the ways we have bars on our windows and gates within gates.” With these concepts in mind, Fernando took us on a journey of his summer groups’ investigation of healthy and hazardous environments of schools in LAUSD.

I focused on the documentary segment of Fernando’s presentation because the montage of interview answers, b-roll, images, and words across the screen added another dimension to Bernardo’s presentation. According to some of the students in the audience, they enjoyed the documentaries because they brought the research to life. But equally as important, the students in the audience were being exposed to complex ideas such as social and physical ecology and how it impacts their lived condition. For example, the Panther students could relate to the concepts of gated communities because all around the school were gates on windows and fences around the perimeter of the school. But digging even deeper, they were exposed to these ideas of feeling imprisoned and how that affects one’s ability to learn. Although the gates were just one aspect of the documentary that I focused in on here, it represented a powerful part that brought to

life Fernando's idea of physical ecology. According to Bernardo these gates at Panther High showed a lack of trust of students and low expectations for their academics. All in all though, the important thing that I took away from this experience is the documentaries were powerful tools to bring these research projects to life. Furthermore, creating documentaries was a literacy that they learned in FSP, a skill not often taught as part of the traditional school curriculum at Panther High School.

Asking questions, engaging the audience's prior knowledge

Another effective teaching approach that Karina used to engage her peers was asking them questions about the subject matter. Here is an example of Karina soliciting the opinions of her fellow schoolmates.

Karina: What is your idea of an ideal teacher?

Panther student: An ideal teacher is someone who cares and who wants to see us succeed in life and that sacrifices their time in helping us students.

K: Do you see that a lot here at Crenshaw?

PS: Not really but yeah. My teachers really do sacrifice their time to help me.

K: We found that the state of California actually provides an adequate amount of qualified teachers. But I think that we deserve more like we deserve teachers who not only care for us academically but also emotionally. Therefore, the definition of highly qualified does not go far enough.

Bridging the Panther student's response to her research project, Karina brings up a solid critique of what it meant to be a highly qualified teacher. In her presentation she showed that 83% of teachers at Crenshaw were qualified to teach at the school by definition of the state. Using a problem-posing pedagogy, Karina pushed the students to question what does being a qualified teacher really mean? And does the state's definition of highly-qualified coincide with the students' definition? According to the California Department of Education website, "The

federal definition of a Highly Qualified Teacher (HQT) is three fold: teachers must hold at least a bachelors degree, be appropriately licensed by the state, and demonstrate subject matter competency.” Just as Karina did with the students, if we compared this definition to the Panther student’s definition of an ideal teacher, the two do not match up. Therefore, Karina raised a valid argument in that the state’s “definition of highly qualified does not go far enough,” at least in terms of what students at Panther high school expect from their teachers. And Karina made her argument come to life for her peers by simply asking questions to gauge their understandings of the subject matter. What this showed me was, as a part of their pedagogy, Karina and her research partners were learning teaching methods that they could employ to make their presentations more effective and engaging.

Sharing examples and stories of life experiences

As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, Sasha developed her critical consciousness and a critique of her schooling experience at Panther when she had the opportunity to visit other schools and see what learning resources other students had available to them. Having gone through this process, Sasha shared those experiences with her fellow peers to bring to life the discrepancies she had witnessed between urban schools and those in wealthier neighborhoods. This was her testimony in talking about the differences.

For example in Richside High, we had seen this whole building just dedicated to science. And they had an astrology room. And they had two different lunch areas and cafeterias. You know, even like the soda machines, they didn’t have gates around it. They have banners around it to show school pride. But you know we have to fish in to put our money in. It’s just open to them. They just have better things.

Even minute details like gates on a soda machine were apparent to Sasha. She wanted to get the point across that Panther High and schools like theirs were very different from those like Richside High School. Therefore, for students that may have never stepped onto Richside High

School's campus, they may have never known that there were stark differences between the two campuses or they may have never questioned the quality of their schooling environment. But what made this short testimony so powerful was Sasha was speaking from her own experience. Like I mentioned earlier, the Panther student researchers internalized this idea of speaking from the heart and speaking from experience. They used it as a tool to make their research topics tangible to their audience. This tactic was especially effective for the student audience because they knew Sasha was coming from the same place and educational experience. So, her analysis of the situation was well received. Equally as impactful, Sasha ended her presentation with testimony of how this experience of doing research transformed her perspective and awareness about what was going on around her.

“It's changed me by making me more knowledgeable and aware of my surroundings and how the government is and how it works and how the school system is. Before I thought Panther High School was cool. I thought Panther was one of the best. But knowing that there are better schools out there, it made me want to want more. Because if you were to look at a school in Ohio and they live in the poorest city, like a poorer city than any out here, they have way better schools than we do. And just knowing that has made me want more and more for other people.”

Moving from Ohio after her sophomore year in high school, Sasha and her family chose Panther High School because they thought it was the best school in the area. On the contrary, after she conducted research over the summer, she developed a deeper understanding of inequitable schooling conditions and wanted to share that with her peers. Her testimony, her lived experience was the one research data that brought home her argument. Like Sasha, ultimately, this whole process drastically changed the outlook of all the Panther students as they too shared their narratives of how doing research had impacted their lives.

Karina: This program has changed me in a good way because now I put school as my first priority. And I see how important it is in my future.

Fernando: How has this changed me? I am more aware and I inform others and I am resistant when I know that a teacher is teaching just textbook work and doesn't let you talk. I know that there is a problem and that she does not want to interact with you and communicate with you. And that shows a lack of authentic caring.

Ryan: It changed me by informing me and changing my perspective of how I see things. And it prepared me academically. For example I have more confidence when presenting a PowerPoint to students for a project and now I question things.

In summary, these testimonies showed the trajectory of self-awareness and development of sense individual agency as each of them told their peers how doing research changed them. It must have been empowering for their peers to hear that Karina put school as her first priority. The broader society would like to believe that youth from urban areas do not care about their education, but these students were proof that they do care and that engaging learning spaces like FSP helped them prioritize their education. Fernando cared so much about his education that he resisted disengaging teaching practices and demanded more from his teachers. And in Ryan's situation, he developed academic skills like creating PowerPoints and speaking in public. And just as important as those academic literacies, he gave witness to having developed the critical literacies of questioning the conditions and learning experiences that he once took for granted. All in all, these testimonies were markers of where they were at during the beginning of the school year.

Peer Influence

The last part of the Panther presentations that I want to focus on is their recommendations also known as the marching orders they had for their fellow peers. We taught our students whenever they presented they had to leave their audience with marching orders, concrete steps or actions that the audience could take upon to address the issues that were being researched.

Although, each student researcher had a different set of marching orders for their respective projects, Karina's recommendations encompassed all the others. Her recommendations were called the 3-step approach. "The first step is to get informed about education because education is the key to our future. The second one is to get critical by asking tough questions and challenging your teachers. And the third one is to take action. For example, when you turn eighteen you should register to vote because your vote counts and it can help out in the future too."

As part of the first step of this three-step approach, one of the underlying purposes for presenting their work to other Panther students was to hopefully recruit some of them to join the program so that they could learn more about what was going on in education. Mr. Derrick and I were well aware that four out of five of our current student researchers were going to graduate at the end of the school year and we needed new blood. And as the students researchers have shown, being part of FSP and doing research became a tool to think critically about the conditions of urban education.

Talking to the second step, Ryan as part of his recommendations said, "If someone tells you that you are receiving an adequate education, you should be like, really? Because an adequate education is not good enough for urban youth, for example us. Other schools have better material than us while we don't." Ryan was pushing his fellow peers to question. As he mentioned before, there was a time in his life that he never questioned what was going on at school and he never questioned the authority of the adults at his school. But after having participated in FSP, he asked more questions and found out that young people have the power to change their education. This was positive peer pressure because he was saying that he had been through the YPAR process and asking questions had changed his outlook.

Lastly, this three-step approach that Karina brought to the students called for action. For Karina, one way to steer the politics of education was to vote. This action was relevant to many of the audience members because many of them were seniors about to turn eighteen. Emma, on the other hand, gave a concrete example of what to do if a class was not engaging.

“If you believe that your class is lame and your teacher is not teaching and you are not engaging or maybe you like the subject but you feel that your teacher is not that engaging, instead of falling asleep or talking to someone, you should try to have an engaging conversation with your teacher. Because sitting in a class and not doing something about it, is not going to help you. But when you talk to your teacher and give them ideas of what you would like for him to teach, it creates a better environment in the classroom. Not only do you learn but you can educate your own teacher as well.

Looking at her recommendation, Emma told the students that they had power to change the situation found in many of their classes. They could change their learning experiences if they mustered the courage to talk to their teachers and communicate their concerns. She even went as far to say that they had the power to educate their teachers as well. This was powerful to watch in that Emma internalized the idea that young people at her school actually had power and that they needed to take action. She was influencing her peers not to wait on adults to change the conditions at the school, but rather to be strategic and take matters into their own hands.

In retrospect, these presentations, according to the five student researchers were the least polished out of all the presentations they had all year. However, from my perspective they were the most important. In his reflection Ryan wrote, “I was nervous when I was up there presenting. One of my cards fell out of order and I got stuck and felt embarrassed when I was looking for what to say according to my card. After the presentation, I felt relieved and glad that it was over.” Regardless of his self-critique, I personally felt that they had accomplished a great feat. Their presentations represented a cultural transmission from student to student. It was not everyday that the students in the audience got the chance to witness their peers engage in

transformative work like they did that afternoon. To me, I witnessed these five student researchers teach and facilitate a learning space with their peers about complex issues going on at Panther High School and other urban schools. All the while, they were also resisting the deficit perspective put on youth of color from urban areas by trying to gather allies and showing their schoolmates that they had the power to change their educational outcomes. This was their first collective endeavor as a group and their first action of the school year. In the following sections, I will analyze their process of presenting to adults at two other events and the ways in which they altered their presentations to best engage their audience.

Presentation 2: Demanding Excellence and Quality Education

Presenting to adults was a bit different than presenting to their peers. Along with the concept of “coming from the heart,” we also pushed our students to challenge their audience by either *shaming* them for letting these inequitable learning conditions occur in urban school or *inspiring* them to do something to change those implorable conditions. Therefore, as part of their presentations the students not only presented their research findings, but they demanded change just like other young people of color have in the past like the Black Panther Party and Young Lords.

Frederick Douglas once said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand, it never did and it never will.” This quote related to the students’ YPAR process because, with their newfound knowledge, they demanded change. Traditionally, one of the main tasks of researchers in completing their research papers and/or presentations is providing a list of recommendations and future directions for their readers and audiences to consider. However, as part of the culture of FSP and as a community of practice, the student researchers a couple years back decided to develop lists of demands for their research instead of recommendations. Directed

to specific stakeholders in education, these demands were challenges to certain stakeholders in education, to take responsibility and initiative to change the inequitable conditions they had been studying from their vantage point. It is through these demands and in the ways that the Panther students presented them at the Labor Center presentations, I witnessed Frederick Douglas' challenge to oppressed people put into action. Unwaveringly and with conviction and indignation, the Panther students challenged their audience with their list of demands, starting with students, then teachers, then parents, and lastly with challenges for school and district administrators.

Demanding a 21st century quality education

That evening the students were, as I described it in my field notes, "on fire." For example, when presenting his demands to teachers, Fernando opted not to speak from the microphone. Instead he spoke with a loud and authoritative voice that could still be heard by everyone throughout the hall. With gusto, he addressed the crowd,

"Are there any teachers here today?" About half of the hands in the crowd went up. "Teachers! Knowing that books are not culturally relevant, don't just teach directly from the book. Relate the stuff to students' lives and culture. In other words if a student is sleeping there is a problem." The audience laughed but Fernando was not amused. He came back at them with, "This is reality people. It's not funny." And that silenced the crowd immediately because they knew he was serious.

"Also, do you guys notice how students only have basic technological skills? That is *unacceptable* for this to be happening in the 21st century. Teachers, incorporate technology in your curriculum. We want students to at least know basic technological skills, like basic researching and using PowerPoint and Word."

Fernando's demands were straightforward and laid out specific marching orders for teachers to follow. Fernando did not try and sugar coat the reality of the situation at his school. He knew that they did not have culturally relevant textbooks at his school, and therefore, pushed teachers

to come up with innovative ways to transform something that was initially irrelevant to students' lives into learning experiences that connected to students' lived experiences. He challenged teachers to go above and beyond their responsibilities of facilitating a state mandated scripted curriculum. Additionally, Fernando threw in a critique of the all too familiar picture of students sleeping in class. The audience laughed because they knew that this phenomenon of students sleeping in class was evident at every school. But instead of placing the blame on the students for not being awake in class, Fernando put the responsibility on teachers in making sure that their curriculum and pedagogy were engaging in which students stayed awake and participated in the learning process.

Although I will never know the true impacts that Fernando's demands had on many of the teachers in the crowd that night, I do have data that shows how Fernando's convictions impacted one important teacher in the crowd that night, Mr. Derrick. During, my last interview with Mr. Derrick at the end of the school year, I asked him what were some of the ways that the students grew over the past couple of years while participating in FSP. One of the examples he gave was he witnessed the students taking more ownership of their schooling, expecting more from it and holding their teachers accountable to engage them and their peers with curriculum that was relevant to their lives and aspirations. Mr. Derrick gave an example of how Fernando actually held him accountable for his responsibilities in scaffolding and implementing the use of technology for their Economics class project.

“Well I remember when Fernando kind of checked me one time after our presentation. He was like “Mr. Derrick, when are we going to do something that involves computers?” That was after the presentation. And we were going to use computers in his class, but at the moment I had not formulated it in a sense of what they are going to use computers for and really structured it. You know I kind of just lagged on the scaffolding and Fernando was itching already...Fernando was like, “We only have four more weeks.” So, he held me

accountable, making sure that we were going to have at least one project that involved computers.”

In result, Mr. Derrick assigned them a project where they had to profile a third world country and develop a PowerPoint to present to the class. Fernando's demands at the Labor Center Presentation and his conversations with Mr. Derrick impacted the way that Mr. Derrick planned out and executed his Economics curriculum. In demanding more projects that entailed the use of technology, Fernando actually pushed Mr. Derrick to be introspective of his practice and responsibilities as a teacher. And being the critical teacher that Mr. Derrick was, he listened to Fernando's critiques of his pedagogy and tailored the class project to address the needs of his students. This was a powerful example because it showed how Fernando's agency during the presentation and, even after in the classroom, challenged even one of the most critical educators at Panther High School, Mr. Derrick. However, even though Mr. Derrick was accommodating to Fernando's demands, not all teachers have responded to Fernando's approach in a similar fashion.

In one of my initial interviews with Fernando, he told me some teachers like his Math teacher for example, just ignores him and his comments. However, regardless if he gets the desired responses from his teachers, he always stood his ground. To best describe the agency that he has developed, I use Fernando's own words from one of our interviews. “If I see a problem, I resist it. I don't just sit there waiting for somebody to change it.” That night at the labor center was no different than his experiences in his classroom. Fernando's sense of individual agency had pushed him to act upon his critical consciousness in different spaces. The only difference that night was he had the full attention of the audience. Through it all, Fernando's conviction inspired one of his teachers, Mr. Derrick, to develop a curriculum around

him and his peers needs. And that to me was a huge step to changing their condition at their school.

What this has taught me that sometimes sense of agency comes at the times that they are called upon to step up. In my field notes I recalled what it was like the night before their presentation. “Mr. Derrick and I kept on getting on them. They had made one of the cleanest power points that I have ever seen. All the information was there and their talking points were all on point. But what was missing was their soul. Fred and I could see that from their exhaustion that the soul of the presentation was not there. But we couldn't teach or scaffold or lesson plan or show the students how to bring the intensity to their presentations. For once, Mr. Derrick and I had to let go and believe that they had to find their fire. They were the ones who had to rise to the occasion and stand up to the unjust conditions that them and their peers were facing at school.” And Fernando and the whole crew did just that. When it mattered most the students found it within themselves to bring life and relevance to their presentation. Their sense of purpose and agency pushed them do demand change with authority. Our after school FSP sessions scaffolded the learning process for these students, but the students had to develop their sense of agency to where it impacted their audiences’ actions and perceptions. Here is an excerpt from my field notes after the presentation:

“All of mine and Mr. Derrick's stresses were for nothing. They were fighting back. They were resisting oppression. They didn't want to just let their miseducation slide by anymore. They were fed up and tonight their voices and their souls were powerful and they made sure that they were heard.”

Talking to one of my major research questions, the Panther student researchers were resisting deficit perceptions by showing up that evening and presenting their research with conviction and indignation, teaching others about their experiences as mistreated youth, while influencing the

way that one of their teachers actually taught. This to me was very telling of what their sense of agency looked like and how their actions actually impacted their schooling experience.

Presentation 3: Rollin' with the "Professionals," Presenting to a National Audience

This presentation was different from the other two because the students were presenting their research at a professional educational conference with educators and leading researchers in the field of education from all over the country. In the past this space has been very much an adult-occupied and facilitated conference. However, over the past couple of years certain youth groups including FSP broke this mold in bringing students to the annual conference to present their research. From what I have witnessed, many members of the national organization gladly welcomed the students with open arms and words of support while a few skeptics questioned the relevance of youth presence at the conference. But I can understand their reservations in that just the mere presence of these high school students at the conference challenged the status quo and pushed our perceptions of who is considered legitimate researchers. In this section, I will explore how the Panther students embodied the identities of researcher and teacher as they presented at the conference.

This third and final presentation at AERA in New Orleans was their culminating event of the year. They worked tirelessly throughout the school year up until this point to teach people from all over the country what was happening at their school. No matter what others perceived of them, I could feel that they were there on a mission to inform folks and gather allies in their struggle. In previous presentations, I made sure to ask the students what were their concerns and expectations before presenting. And initially the answers were always, "I hope I don't mess up" or "I'm nervous." This time around, their concerns were different. Here was a conversation that Ryan and I had the night before their large Presidential Session.

Mark: So how are you feeling about tomorrow?

Ryan: I feel that we need to practice. But I think we have a powerful message to bring to the table.

M: What is one thing that you gotta do?

R: I got to practice. And I have to be passionate about it.

M: Why do you have to be passionate about it, B?

R: Because it's the truth. It's what we've been through. My fellow classmates.

M: When you make this presentation tomorrow, what is one thing that you think is going to change about the situation? What is one thing that you hope to change about this situation?

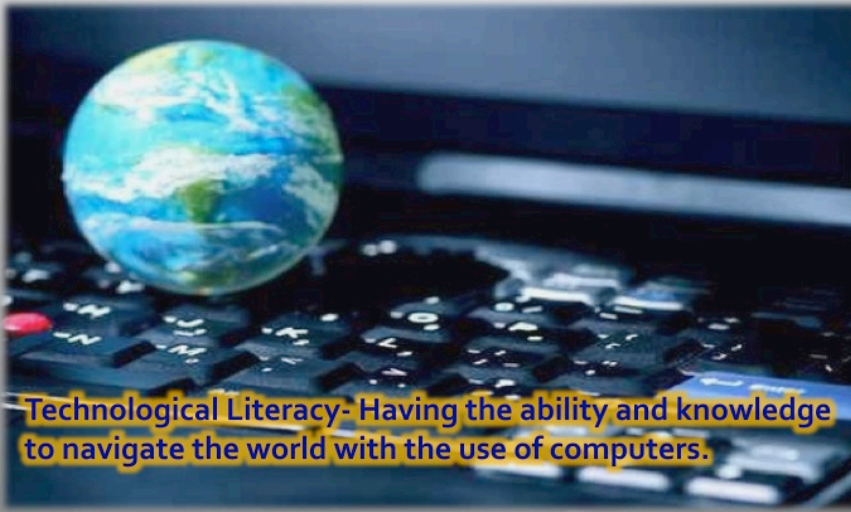
R: I think it will bring insight to people who have a deficit view of us. We're going to give them a perspective of why students fail classes. I hope they gain a different perspective after the presentation.

As we can tell from this small conversation, it was much more than being reluctant at doing well. More of the emphasis, according to Ryan, was about being effective in their presentation. They were at AERA on a mission to speak “truth” to power and challenge the idea that only adults can produce insightful research. AERA was a space where adult educators and researchers came together to analyze the conditions happening in schools across the nation from their perspectives. However, Ryan wanted people at the conference to see that student perspectives were important and integral to plotting solutions for educational inequities. His purpose was to resist as he said, “the deficit view” of young people like himself and show others that him and his group have thought critically about what causes students to disengage at their school. Ryan’s confidence emanated from his understanding of the subject matter. In studying the issues of technological and cultural illiteracy at his school for the past six months, he was ready to share this information with others.

The most powerful moments of this presentation were when the students taught the audience about the concepts that they came up with: cultural illiteracy and technological

illiteracy—two very loaded and potent terms. Earlier on in this chapter, I talked about how the students came up with the concept of technological illiteracy. In this section, I examine the ways that they actually talked about these concepts and presented them to others. In their presentations they first defined the terms of what it meant to be culturally literate and technologically literate.

...The World We Live In.



Technological Literacy- Having the ability and knowledge to navigate the world with the use of computers.

...What We Work With.

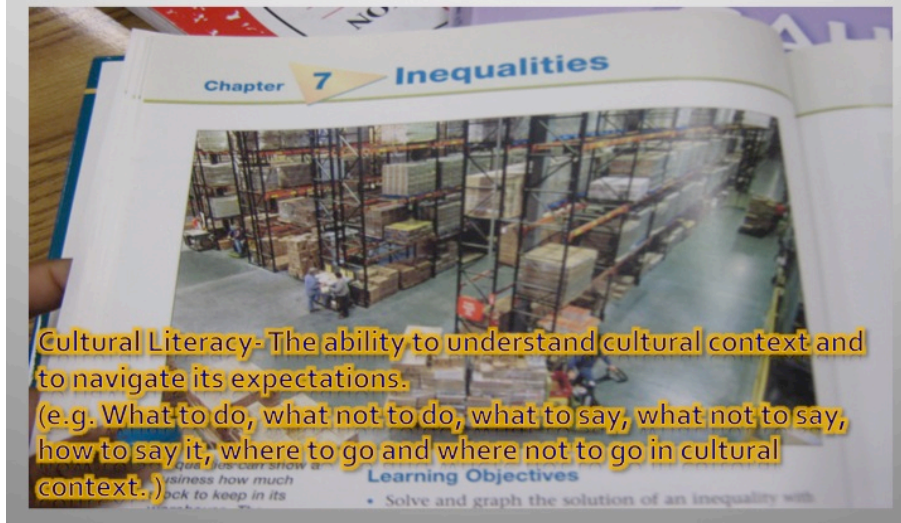


Figure 4.8

Let's take a peak into how they presented these concepts at AERA.

Technological illiteracy analysis

F: Our research was finding out what resources at Crenshaw did students have access to. Our findings give us an understanding that learning resources are not equally distributed between rich and urban students. This leads us to the title of our presentation. Cougars or Kittens: Examining the impacts of Cultural and Technological illiteracy...

E: Technological literacy means having the knowledge and the ability to navigate the world with the use of computers. An example of that is being able to email. Also being able to use a flash drive without having any issues. Which brings us to our claim. Panther students do not have access to updated technology that leads to many students being technologically illiterate. According to our research many of our students are familiarized with social networks such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. But they are unfamiliar with researching, creating PowerPoints, and are unaware of what a USB is, resulting in technological illiteracy. Here's an example of the type of technology that is being provided to us (refer to Figure 4.3). A flash drive, a floppy disk, which is obsolete in today's society. Also, Windows XP was developed in ten years ago and my classmate Fernando will get more into that.

F: We see our first claim being expressed in a student interview that we conducted. The student that we interviewed explained that he tried using a computer in the library but it was really slow. As you can see in this picture here (Figure 4.4) 14 out of 16 computers in our library are ten years old and still running with Windows XP which was created in 2001. In other words are school was behind a whole decade in technology. In order for students to be college competitive, *we must* have access to real world tools. Just as important as technology is for our education are the type of textbooks that we are receiving.

Before I talk about how the students presented the concept of cultural illiteracy and their survey of the types of textbooks they had available to them, let us first analyze their presentation of technological illiteracy. As part of their talking points, Emma brought life to the concept of technological illiteracy by connecting it to real situations at Panther High School while Bernardo backed those experiences up with their research findings.

As the students prepared their talking points for their presentations throughout the year, we always asked them to connect what they had learned to what they have experienced. So, when Emma thought about what it meant to be technologically illiterate, she constructed the narrative that she has witnessed that her peers were very familiar in navigating social networks like Facebook and Twitter but were unaware of how to do tasks like doing research on the internet efficiently, creating PowerPoints, and knowing how to save electronic files on a flash drive. Although I would argue that being able to use social networks proficiently is a highly complicated skill and technological literacy, Emma's argument was grounded in her reality and she felt that the latter skills were the one's that were going to be the most useful in college. Like the others in her group, it was not until she got into FSP that she was exposed to the literacies of developing PowerPoint presentations and creating documentaries about their research. Emma's argument was logical because creating a PowerPoint and using a flash drive are fundamental skills that many postsecondary institutions assume their students know how to navigate. But according to Emma's narrative, that was not the reality at her school. All in all, Emma made this

concept of technological illiteracy tangible to the audience by using her experience and observations as a student as one of their groups' findings.

On the other hand, Fernando triangulated the groups' data sources by connecting Emma's participant observations with observations of his own and some interview data. As mentioned earlier on in this chapter, it was the comments by their peers that pushed the Panther student researchers to identify the type of technology that was available to them at their school, leading them to come up with the concept of technological illiteracy. However, what I want to focus on in Fernando's talking points was when he expressed they were being denied "access to real world tools." He understood the types of tools that they would be using in college and in the workforce, and he argued that these tools were not a part of his education. I can make the same claim as Fernando, but since it was coming from him as a student it was powerful to witness that he knew what he deserved and he demanded it. That is what I would call self-empowerment. This research process transformed the way he looked at the situation.

You can see this process of self-empowerment in Fernando's reflection after the trip to the conference.

The experience I had in New Orleans changed my identity as a student by helping me to become more demanding. Now I feel that not speaking up is like not caring for your education and your community's education. If people don't start to speak up, it won't just be this generation's education being affected, but the younger generations also. In other words, if we aren't resistant we will not see a change. I plan to help younger generations in the future by creating a program like FSP in my community so that their voices are heard.

Fernando's sense of agency helped him develop an understanding of what resources he needed in his education, pushing him to demand relevant resources for his peers and other young people like him. Ultimately, Fernando and Emma were being active agents in their community by being the representatives from their schooling experience and their community.

As much as this process was an empowering experience for Emma and Fernando, they were also presenting legitimate research. In spaces like AERA, I think when we see research coming from young people we seem to dismiss the work as being “cute” or not as viable because it is coming from them. However, I argue that they have learned how to conduct social science research, triangulated their data sources, and infused their experience and perspectives as the main stakeholders of education within it. This is a great example of the students mediated cultural deficit perceptions by not only showing others they were proficient at doing research but that they actually did care about the wellbeing of their community and the people in it.

Cultural illiteracy analysis

Now let us look at the way they taught the concept of cultural illiteracy.

K: Our definition of cultural literacy is the ability to understand cultural context and to navigate its expectations. This leads us to our second claim. The claim that we found is that students don’t have access to culturally relevant textbooks. I feel that if my textbooks had stories of my culture, I’ll feel more engaged with the class. When I first read the book *Always Running* I could really relate to it because similar things happen in my community. When they mention about how rival gangs will shoot at each other, it reminds me of every time I hear shooting. When I hear shooting it really worries me because I think of many people like family, a friend, or someone I go to school with.

R: Instead of textbooks being relevant to a student, a student’s culture is Euro-centric. Take this quote for instance, “textbooks should be taught based on the culture of students instead of everything being defined by the dominant culture. Since textbooks are Euro-Centric they marginalize students of color, forcing them to value the dominant culture. Cultural relevancy has a big impact on students. The reason why is because students become disengaged in class because textbooks don’t relate to their experiences like Karina’s.

The concept technological literacy was a fascinating concept to explore. But when the students came up with cultural illiteracy it was mind blowing. As an educator and scholar, the students pushed my understanding of culture by explaining that there is a literacy to navigating one’s culture. They defined cultural literacy as the “the ability to understand cultural context and

to navigate its expectations.” As an educator, I would ask myself what does cultural literacy have to do with teaching and learning. To them, it had everything to do with their education. Karina and Ryan argued that the lack of culturally relevant textbooks made them and their peers less engaged in their schoolwork. Conversely, since they were being taught through Euro-centric curriculum, they were not learning their personal histories and relevant cultural knowledge that they could use to navigate their surroundings or at the least think critically about their conditions.

Karina found that one book in her educational experience that was relevant to her life, *Always Running*. Karina was concerned about gangs and violence because they directly impacted the people around her like her family and friends. What’s important to note here is that Karina’s 11th grade English teacher took a risk and used reading material outside the standard curriculum, believing that students like Karina could relate to the narrative told in the book. I am not saying that any educator should just assume that all young people who live in urban areas could relate to a book like *Always Running* and blindly implement it into the classroom, but at least for Karina’s experience, that book engaged her in the subject matter. In a follow-up interview Karina told me that her 11th grade English class was one of the few classes that she really enjoyed during her time at Panther High School and that she received an A in.

Overall, Karina and Ryan had a critique of the Euro-centric schooling that they were receiving but also presented a solution. They talked about marginalization and being forced “to value the dominant culture.” As educators, their insight pushed us to be critical of the political nature of our curriculum and our approach. As they point out, culturally relevant learning resources impact their engagement in the classroom and their lens to looking at the world.

Challenging a national community of scholars

The students' data analysis led them to their research demands, challenging this national community of scholars to take action on the issues that they were experiencing at Panther High School. At conferences like AERA, the traditional format of presenting research often ends with recommendations for the audience to consider. In the presentation of the FSP students however, they demanded change.

S: Now what becomes of these students who do not have updated technology and who will not be able to develop computer skills and students who do not have culturally relevant textbooks? They will become disengaged in those classes and fail those classes which will negatively affect their GPA. And all of this comes down to these students not being college competitive and using that education to give back to their communities, economically, educationally, and culturally.

F: Now we are demanding. Teachers create engaging curriculum. If it were not for the CYR I will not demonstrate proficiency in PowerPoint and I would not have come across a culturally relevant text.

E: Grad students, you have done your research and written your dissertations. What are you now doing to make sure that the findings in your research do not exist?

K: Professors, create powerful program like FSP to make the university level research accessible to students.

R: Policy makers, if you provide culturally relevant pedagogy and access to up to date technology to students at my school, they will not only be prepared and eligible for college but able to survive it.

Once again, as Sasha pointed out, the education that they were dreaming of was not just for their benefit but also for the benefit of their community. She was making the point that if they had access to these types of resources at their school students would better be prepared for college and would have developed the skills necessary to come back and contribute to the well being of their communities. Like Valenzuela (1999), the students challenged the notion that young people in urban areas have to leave behind their culture and community to be successful in life.

In contrast, the Panther students see success as gaining a quality education to better the community that they grew up in.

Similar to his demands at the Labor Center presentation, Fernando again demanded that teachers “create engaging curriculum.” His demand spoke for itself. However, directly following, Emma challenged the graduate students in the crowd. This was a direct challenge to researchers that go into communities and do their research and never come back to help their research participants address the issues that they were studying. Therefore, Emma challenged every researcher in the audience to get engaged with the community and struggle side by side with them. Duncan-Andrade (2009) refers to this type of work of going down the difficult path with students as providing critical hope. In this context, Emma pushed researchers to do the same but, instead of with students the same type of commitment needed to be made with research participants. In all honesty, I felt that her demand talked directly to my experience with them. This work pushed me and the other two adult facilitators to struggle day in and day out with these five youth. This work in FSP was more than just teaching how to conduct research and make sense of it. It was about providing meals for the students every time that we met because we knew they had to be physically nourished before we could engage in complex learning experiences. It was about providing rides for the students to presentations and back home. Ultimately, this work was about building trust and getting to know the students individually in order to develop effective working relationships with them. When they saw that we believed in them, they believed in themselves. Therefore, Emma’s demand was not meant to say that grad students and researchers need to solve their issues, but rather they need to struggle alongside with them. This demand really talked to the fact that they were trying to gain allies in this community in transforming their lived experience.

On the flip side, Karina challenged professors who had institutional power to create programs like FSP at their institution and surrounding communities. Making university level research accessible to younger students like her has proved to be an asset for researchers like us. Yes learning researcher was a pedagogical tool that we used to engage these five students, but it also served as a platform to get their thoughts about their educational experiences out into the open so they can deconstruct and think critically of the social and political implications of their lived experiences. In one of our interviews after the conference, Mr. York talked about the importance of youth voice in educational research.

I guess the major thing that they have taught me and I'm still learning is that no matter how many different ways I can position my own subjectivity, be up front about my biases, and reflect on my own experiences is that the educational experience or the institutional education is forever shifting. And it exists as something that is very indicative of the social and political dynamics of this particular time. And so they keep teaching and affirming to me that they are the experts. They are the ones that are in it. My way of knowing goes back five years when I was in high school. And no matter how much I work with them and no matter how much I understand...the subtle nuances, the way a counselor approached you, whether or not block scheduling is effective for you or whether not this class is better than this class or this reading was better than that reading, those are the questions within my day to day research activities, they are not that significant to me. Those kind of build the fabric, the passion that is coming from the research. And that to me shapes a different narrative altogether. So, they taught me that this enterprise is consistently changing and we constantly have to turn to the people that are participating in it for us to really get to the bottom of what's really going on.

I too agree with Mr. York's analysis of the youths' research project. As seasoned researchers, we apprentice high school students in the research process. But the narrative that they come with, brings a whole other spectrum of experiences that we may have not considered as adults. Yes, Mr. York may have had a similar schooling experience to those of the Panther students, but like he said the students' specific schooling experience exists within the social and political climate of their time. For example, before the *Williams* case, just having access to textbooks and

having a clean and safe environment was the concerns of students and their parents at that moment in time. But now that the Panther students live in the information age, in which updated technology and culturally relevant textbooks speak to their needs. We provided the tools and approach to YPAR and the students, as Mr. York so eloquently described, provided the narrative. All in all, this was a collective endeavor that led to legitimate educational research and that helped students actualize their sense of agency.

Lastly, Ryan addressed the other people who also had a high degree of institutional power, policy makers. To everyday people, the ways that educational policy is developed seems nebulous. However, to Ryan, he knew that just demanding them to listen to their needs could impact educational reform that is implemented at their school. Referring back to his reflection before the presentations, Ryan wanted the audience to gain a different perspective. And I think that was really at the crux of the students' mission when they presented at AERA. On one hand, they wanted to debunk perceptions put on youth of color like them by showing that they can be engaged in the learning process if it was relevant to their lives. On the other hand, they sought to prove that young students like themselves have a vital narrative that needed to be considered in educational research and reform. They are the ones who lived and learned in the institutions that adults developed. Therefore, Ryan's demand represented this ideological shift that had to occur. If we value student voice and input, then we as adults must develop research and policies together with young people.

The students' presentation was important in spaces like AERA because in an adult-occupied space, it was vital to get the perspectives of arguably the main stakeholders of the educational system, young people. At conferences like AERA we discuss, analyze, and theorize what education should look like for young people. As professional educational researchers, I

feel to further our analysis and push the types of educational solutions that we conjure up in these spaces, we have to consider the voices, experiences, and as pertinent to this study, the critical analyses of our young people about their schooling experience.

The Essence of YPAR, Foresight and Self-Determination

There is no doubt that these presentations were powerful experiences. However, I think the major impact of this work was actually on the students and their understandings of their future trajectories. At the end of the school year when Mr. Derrick and I reflected back on the growth of our students, we felt that all of them have grown immensely academically and personally since our first days of working with them in FSP. In my final interview with him, Mr. Derrick summed up our mutual feelings best when he said,

“The first thing that comes to mind is you just see growth in the students...Growth in the sense that they developed some capacity for leadership. Because they’ve gone through this process and they’re grounded with ideas of what it means to be them as students and as community members. You just see and feel like they’ve got a direction in terms of what they’re trying to do and what they’re trying to do it for.”

I too felt the same about the development of our students. Over time they developed an understanding or as I would like to call it, foresight to what they planned to do in the future. Additionally, what was important to realize about our students’ future plans were they developed foresight not only with plans of self-gain and development but more so with the understanding of their academic and personal trajectory within the context of community development and social justice.

One of the students that clearly came to mind when we talk about growth was Karina. From my experiences with her in FSP, I always knew her as the “quiet one.” But through the three years of working with her, over time I saw Karina develop her sense of purpose for participating in the program. In one of the interviews, she even claimed that participating in the

program pushed her to get better grades in school. And truthfully so, Karina went from getting Bs, Cs, and Ds to receiving As and Bs on her report card. Karina's narrative showed that FSP really did have a positive impact on her academic achievement. However, that is not my main argument or focus in this section. I argue that this process of doing YPAR and being in FSP holistically impacted her sense of agency in that she made her education a priority so that she may realize her aspirations of becoming an elementary school teacher.

One of the many powerful moments that I experienced in doing this research was watching and listening to one of Karina's presentations at the national conference.

"Before I was part of the CYR I felt marginalized. I felt alone in my education and like no one cared about me and that made me not care about school. However, the Freedom Scholars Program made me realize that education is important in my life and the only way to make it through my life was to continue my education after high school... Having the knowledge that schools are unequal will make me a good teacher in the future. I will like to go back to my community and teach at our local elementary schools because I understand where students are coming from and what their needs are because that's where I grew up. I feel students shouldn't feel marginalized at a young age like I once did."

Karina's presentation that evening will forever be seared into my memories. Her testimony that evening reminded me of the community cultural wealth theory (Yosso 2005) in that I witnessed Karina embody the concepts of aspirational and resistance capitals. Yosso talked about aspirational capital as being able to accomplish goals even in the face of adversity. Karina navigated her way to graduating from an under-resourced school where only forty percent of students graduate after four years. Additionally, she reached her goals and did it with a purpose to give back and contribute to the wellbeing of her community. This is where the idea of resistance capital comes into play. She was resisting the ill-conditions that she faced as a youth and planned to transform that condition of feeling marginalized for other youth growing up in her neighborhood. Her counter-narrative of being a marginalized youth is one of many that are missing from educational research that places blame on urban students for their

underachievement in public schools. In front of strangers, that evening Karina expressed her feelings of being hurt and dehumanized and how she did not want any other youth like her to feel the hopelessness she once felt. For all of her life she went through an educational experience that was oppressive. But now, having been in the program, she gained the agency and saw the necessity to change those conditions. This reminds me of Freire's concept of critical consciousness in that, as an ontological process, Karina pinpointed and become critical of the inequitable power dynamics that existed in her everyday reality, pushing her to pave a path that will lead to transforming those very conditions.

Within all their actions of presenting, foresight and self-determination were the most important concepts that I gathered from this research project. I say this because to me this is what agency means—to have the sense and ability to understand what is one's personal contribution in their personal lives and in their communities. This brings me back to my point that when Mr. Derrick, Mr. York, and I are not there with the students, what will they do with their lives and their education? And from what I have witnessed over the past year, our students have become great and thoughtful leaders in their school community and in society as a whole. They went through a rigorous and complex learning process to become agents of change, and however that manifests itself in their future trajectories is up to them. But at the very least, I know that their agency is transformative and comes from a place of positive self-actualization while, at the same time, builds and sustains the wellbeing of their community. The ways that they lead their lives is their response, their agency in, and their resistance to the challenges and oppressions perpetrated by the structure of education and the dominant society as a whole.

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Having taken you through a journey of the Panther students' process of developing their agency over the past school year, I now turn to a discussion about the significance of this work we know as YPAR and the future steps to building on this scholarship and practice. This chapter starts with a review of the significance of YPAR to the youth agency of the five Panther students. Then I revisit the ways in which agency has been defined by others and how this study has reshaped the way I now understand the concept, challenging me to develop the three pillars of what I conceptualize as a pedagogy of agency. Thereon after, I go into recommendations for educators that do this work or that hope to take on this work in their own spaces, recommendations for future scholarship on YPAR and critical pedagogy, and demands for more effective and relevant educational policies. From the recommendations, I delve into the limitations of this study and how we can further develop similar research projects but on a much more grandeur scale. Lastly, I conclude this dissertation by connecting it to the current movements and issues that are happening in our nation and around the world, arguing that what we develop with our youth in these YPAR spaces goes beyond research projects. What we are building is agency and lessons that these young people are going to take with them into this world.

Significance of YPAR to Youth Agency

To begin this chapter, I wanted to first take a look back at the significance of YPAR to the development of the agency of the five Panther students in FSP. Overall in my years as an educator, YPAR definitely has been one of the most effective tools and learning spaces that I

have come across because it facilitates the youths' learning of secondary and post-secondary academic skills and, just as important, the critical skills to identify, deconstruct, and challenge inequitable power relations and structures that disadvantage young people and marginalized communities of color.

At the very core of this work, what I witnessed day in and day out was the high engagement of our students. And this was not only in our once a week after school sessions, but the students were engaged in doing this work even on the weekends, during the early mornings and late hours of the night before preparing for their presentations, the four weeks during the year when they would meet every day after school, and a month of their summers. There is no doubt that our five Panther students were dedicated to and enjoyed the work that they were doing. Therefore, this speaks volumes to the power of YPAR—I argue that the students were engaged because for one it was interesting for them to do investigative work and learn the tools and processes in doing research and secondly, it was a relevant learning experience. They were learning about subject matters that directly impacted their everyday lives such as lack of technology and culturally irrelevant textbooks. Yet, they were not only given the chance to interrogate their schooling experience at Panther High but were presented the opportunity to do something about it. Therefore, I think one of the major reasons that they were so engaged was because YPAR gave them a sense of power. This was a major finding because for most of their lives they have been told, implicitly and explicitly, that they would never amount to anything. However, as we have seen in this study they were now taking ownership over their education amidst their deficit upbringings in their schooling.

Secondly, YPAR helped facilitate the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills that they need in high school and college. At the very least, our bottom-line in the FSP was to figure

out ways for our students to gain 21st century academic skills. As we can see from the data, for some of them, this was the first time that they created a PowerPoint and contributed to a blog, which is unacceptable. This goes to show the dismal learning conditions that Panther students are burdened with because those who have power do not want to provide them with 21st century academic tools. I know other schools where every student is given a laptop to keep and work on because it is today's necessary school materials just like pencil and paper was back in the day. But for some reason, the people who make those types of decisions for Panther High students do not see that as a priority. Fortunately enough, through FSP, students were given a chance to learn how to utilize and wield contemporary academic knowledge and skills.

Furthermore, the acquisition of these academic skills not only prepared them for life after high school but the students learned how to use these tools to communicate to and across different audiences as well. This is where the discussion of critical skills comes into play. For example, in the three presentations they did over the school year, the five Panther students were strategic in the ways that they engaged their particular audiences. They used multimedia, shared their counter-narratives and testimonies, and developed documentaries with their audiences in mind. This was the development of critical skills because they were sharing this knowledge not for a grade but to hopefully transform their schooling experience and that of those who follow after them. The acquisition of these skills was not only for their benefit, but they used YPAR as an organizing tool to engage others in their struggle.

Lastly, YPAR was more than just a tool. It was a learning *process* for empowerment and self-efficacy. Through conducting YPAR, the students were learning about themselves and their capacities as intellectuals and as civic agents. Again this goes back to being engaged in the learning process. In being that much of mainstream educational culture is so heavily driven by

standardized testing, I think there is little opportunity and time given for students to actually reflect on how what they are learning teaches them about themselves. In FSP, we always made sure that the students reflected on their process and how their experiences of doing research and of presenting informed who they were. This too was the acquisition of critical skills because they were learning about their roles and responsibilities at their school, in their community, and in their personal lives. Ultimately, all of these lessons have shown me that YPAR was an effective hybrid learning space that, if we pave the path, can be the future of what classrooms around the nation start to embody. Additionally, the significance of YPAR has led me to what I refer to as a pedagogy of agency in that the students not only developed their personal agency, but they took up the roles of pedagogues in the process.

Defining a Pedagogy of Agency

What was most important to note about this research project is that YPAR was a tool to develop the agency of young people that have been dispossessed and a process that pushed them to become public intellectuals. Therefore, in this section I define a pedagogy of agency according to what I have learned from this research. Referring back to my initial understandings of agency from the perspective of others, Callinicos (1988) saw agency manifesting itself in three ways, personal goals, public goals, and social change. Gramsci (1991), on the other hand, talked about the concepts of war of position and war of maneuver as the steps of agency that the underclass take to deconstruct and dismantle hegemony, which is the ruling of an elite class through coercion and consensus. Building off of these theoretical conceptualizations of agency, I redefine agency with a grounded analysis of our YPAR space and how it has led me to the four pillars of pedagogy of agency.

When I think of a pedagogy of agency, I refer back to an analysis of the Black Panther Party (BPP). The Panther High School students were dealing with many similar issues that the Black Panthers had to deal with during their time, such as growing poverty, the increase of drugs in their neighborhoods, deficit perspectives of communities of color, and most pertinent to this study, lack of a quality schooling experience that was relevant to the lives of students. Therefore, the objectives and the motives of the BPP were similar but the tools and strategies have changed. With this in mind, let us juxtapose the process of the BPP and how it relates to what I have researched with my five student researchers in FSP.

Pillar 1 & 2: Self Defense and Critical Consciousness

Arguably, the BPP was noted mostly for their motives of self-defense. The political group grew out of defense from the violence of white people, the police in particular, on their community. In knowing the context of South Central Los Angeles, police brutality is still an issue to be reckoned with. However, the root of the numerous issues in the students' communities is deeper than that, as it was in the time of the BPP. The root of many of the social toxins occurring in communities of color emanates from racism and deficit perspectives of communities of color, especially Black and Brown youth. So, at the time the BPP formed they were most concerned with learning how to defend themselves and controlling the destiny of their communities. And just like the FSP students, the BPP's process started with developing their critical consciousness and the spaces to heal and recognize the humanity and beauty in their people. As Hewey P. Newton (1973) referred to this process as political education classes, we facilitated this type of politicization during our after school program and monthly and summer seminars. The BPP read Frantz Fanon, Chairman Mao Tse Tsung, Che Guevara, and others to develop a critique of the oppressive conditions that they were facing. Additionally, they used

their public observations and engaged in conversations with their community to get a more developed sense of what was really going on in their communities. The students in FSP went through similar processes by engaging with literature on social theories in education and going out into their communities and using research methods to develop their understanding of the most pertinent issues happening in their immediate environments. Therefore, the foundation of self-defense for both BPP and FSP youth began with developing the critical consciousness to read and name their world. Additionally, both groups went about developing their critical consciousness as a collective. Therefore, pedagogy of agency was about developing critical consciousness through a collective process, where both the personal and group's sense of agency was constructed as an action to defend and resist against foreign oppression.

This process of self-defense and building critical consciousness is embodied in what Duncan-Andrade (2009) called critical hope and Socratic hope. Duncan-Andrade writes, "Socratic hope requires both teachers and students to painfully examine [their] lives and actions within an unjust society and to share the sensibility that pain may pave the path to justice. In [his] research, effective educators [taught] Socratic hope by treating the righteous indignation in young people as a strength rather than something deserving of punishment; Freire (2004) called this a "pedagogy of indignation." In this painful yet empowering path of self- and community analysis, young people learn about the disinvestment that society has burdened them with while at the same time develop their hope to fight back, resist, and ultimately transform their lived experiences. Ginwright (2010) also talked about this process as the "radical healing" that young people must go through in order to restore their sense of agency and jog their "political imaginations." Just like BPP, once the student researchers were aware of the inequitable power relations that perpetuated their lived experience, they were more prepared to move onto action. I

argue that pedagogy of agency has to be built upon the foundation of self-defense and critical consciousness. In the context of the Panther High students, the ability to defend themselves from the violence of mainstream society was necessary and to effectively do so they had to develop their critical consciousness. YPAR gave them a fighting chance to deconstruct the violence put on them while, at the same time, allowed them the space to intervene and move forward with their plans of action which was informing others of their conditions.

Pillar 3: Advocacy

Once the students in FSP and the members of the BPP developed their critical consciousness, they then started to move towards their plans of action. In both cases, the youth found it necessary to take up the positions of public intellectuals and advocates for their communities. From their own research and study, the BPP formed a political organization with the objective to voice their concerns as a group on a national stage. They understood the traditional political parties in the United States did not stand for their rights, so they formed their own organization that addressed the needs of the neglected brothers and sisters in urban communities. They informed people in the community about their critique of the oppressive conditions and how they could play a part in moving towards action. In a similar fashion, the students in FSP took up the roles of critical pedagogues when they presented and taught various stakeholders in education about the conditions going on at their school. Like Ryan said the night before their presentation at AERA, “It’s the truth. It’s what we’ve been through. My fellow classmates...we’re going to give them a perspective of why students fail classes.” The FSP students knew their role in advocating for not just them, but their peers as well. They knew they had to break the deficit perspective that blames students, their families, and their culture for failing in the current educational system. They not only understood why these conditions in

urban schools existed, but the FSP students knew what had to be done to solve the issues of cultural and technological illiteracy at their school.

More importantly though, what I learned from the FSP students taking up the roles of public intellectuals, they infused critical pedagogy into their praxis. Learning about Freire's concept of problem-posing pedagogy (1970) really helped the students situate their practices of teaching. They wanted their process to mirror a problem-posing pedagogy because they experienced first hand the marginalizing nature of the banking model of education their whole life. Therefore, like they did in all their presentations, they engaged their audiences and made them part of the presentation. They gave their audience roles and responsibilities to help solve the problems that they brought to the forefront. That being said, pedagogy of agency also means advocating for marginalized and underrepresented communities and taking up the roles of leaders and critical pedagogues within the struggle.

Pillar 4: Self-Determination

Lastly, self-determination is what I considered the most potent aspect of pedagogy of agency. As I determined in the previous chapter, the FSP students' self-determination and foresight was the essence of this research project. YPAR projects and the actions accompanied with them were only the beginning of changing inequitable, undesired social condition. The inequalities they experienced in their school did not change over night. They started the transformation of their school, but it will still be a long process to endure. For example, although the FSP students researched the ill conditions of their school and taught about the lack of technological resources and culturally irrelevant textbooks, Panther High School still has not changed. Students at their school still use the same textbooks and not every student has access to updated technology. So, you may ask what was the point of their research process? It's simple.

Although their surroundings may have not changed over night, or in a month, or even in a couple of years, the fact of the matter was the students were transformed. Their perspectives of themselves and their surroundings were profoundly altered because of the YPAR process. As shown in chapter four, the students had a better understanding of what their roles and responsibilities were as students and civic agents. Like Karina, all of the students made their education a priority regardless if they were being “banked” on or if they received a critical education. They knew what a quality education entailed and they fought for it everyday in their classes and through their FSP presentations.

Additionally, foresight and imagination was a huge part of self-determination. For example, the BPP 10-point program was more than just a platform to solicit membership into their organization and acquire support from others, but more so it represented their vision of an equitable humanizing reality for them and oppressed peoples in America. In FSP, the students developed a better understanding of their future goals and their ideal selves. Furthermore, they developed intricate plans to actually attain their collective and personal goals. Similarly to how the BPP dreamt up and put into action their platform, the FSP students knew their worth and planned their personal paths for the future. This was their self-determination put into action. Ultimately, to complete our understanding of pedagogy of agency, self-determination was the overarching objective. Social reproduction theory (Macleod 2004) argues that people in the underclass are reproduced generation after generation to remain in the same class and social condition. The concept of self-determination breaks that mold. YPAR provided the FSP Panther students with the platform to develop their sense of agency while also gaining the ability to create new realities for themselves and others. That is the essence of pedagogy of agency.

Significance of Pedagogy of Agency

So, what really is the significance of pedagogy of agency? First and foremost, the research of this concept proved to us that young people in urban areas have agency and it is up to us as educators to scaffold the actualizations of their potentials with curriculum and humanizing pedagogy. I even go as far as to argue that pedagogy of agency was only achieved through a rigorous learning process and through a critical community of practice like YPAR. Because when students and teachers worked together, everyone in the process started to understand what they were capable of and were able to demystify the destructive and dehumanizing things that they have learned from society, academia, media, and so on. Furthermore, the FSP students, as well as their adult allies, were provided the chance to develop their sense of duty to one another and to the broader community. As I have shown, the students and the teachers in our space grew from the experience of working with one another. No one was inferior or superior than another; we all took up the roles of students and teachers and shared our expertise in the space. Additionally, this self-actualization process that these students undertook became their weapon to combat their marginalities. They debunked deficit perspectives put on them and showed what they are capable of academically and civically. If only we can devise more learning opportunities and spaces like YPAR, we can broaden the impact of this work to engage the countless amount of students that disengaged from their academics and ultimately, from their lives. Lastly, the major lesson that I have learned is that young people are powerful and have much to contribute and teach us adults about education and about how we should redevelop our institutions, policies, and practices. As adults, it is up to us to ally with our students in this struggle and have their voices be heard and their experiences felt. Because at the end of the day, through academic rigor and civic engagement, we want our young people to know their

potentials and transform the social ills that exist in Black and Brown communities just like the Panther students did over a school year's time. Overall, this process of doing YPAR prepared them to understand and deal with their immediate experiences, while preparing them for life after high school and out in the community.

Further Developing the Movement: Recommendations and Demands

Teacher Recommendations

These are my recommendations for teachers and educators that are interested in doing this type of work. Here are a couple of lessons that I learned as an instructor of this program. One of the first lessons that I learned was that my main responsibility was to facilitate a critical community of practice. At face-value anyone can look at the FSP program at Panther High School and dismiss it as just another University partnered, college-access program for high school students. However, the FSP after school program actually represented an educational space where critical pedagogy was implemented to create a critical counter-culture learning environment for urban youth.

In order to ground my understandings of how our hybrid after school space embodied a critical counter culture, I borrow ideas from an excerpt from *The Art of Critical Pedagogy*.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell write,

After identifying the vehicle, educators should create a critical counter-culture in their classrooms and programs. This should be a culture that mounts a deliberate attack on any and all forms of low expectations and social, political, and economic exploitation, replacing them with a culture of excellence and justice. These efforts should begin by confronting the immediate material conditions of the community where the teaching is taking place. However, the developing of counter-culture should also work to connect the local struggle for freedom to larger state, national, and global struggles over similar issues.

Critical pedagogues should also create opportunities for students to use what they are

learning in ways that directly impact their lives. Such efforts should also prepare students to develop common goals and ready them to work collectively toward them. This means developing a curriculum and pedagogy that address the material concerns of students and their communities (education, housing, justice, jobs, etc.) and that permit and encourage students to use what they are learning to act upon those concerns (p. 172).

In FSP the “vehicle” that was used to engage students in the learning process was YPAR. Our space embodied what Duncan-Andrade and Morrell referred to as a critical counter-culture. Every classroom or learning space has a social and political culture embedded within it whether we as educators want to recognize it or not. In just breaking down the term critical counter-culture, we can see that this differentiates from traditional classroom culture in that it is “critical” of and “counter” to traditional ways of learning. A classroom culture that is critical is one that pushes students to be aware of as well as prepare them to challenge the conditions perpetuated by inequitable power relations. The “counter” part of the term refers to opposing and/or challenging learning spaces that traditionally objectify, marginalize, and make students passive in their own learning processes. I break down this concept into two elements: 1) a culture of excellence that facilitates the learning of academic skills and 2) a culture of justice that helps students develop critical skills and their sense of civic agency. Therefore, spaces like FSP need to be academically rigorous while at the same time acknowledge, critique, and address the social, cultural, historical, and political power relations that the young people live in. As the data shows, all five of the students have gone or are in the process of going to college. However, going to college was only the first step in following through with their life endeavors; they will take whatever they learned in FSP and implement it in their academic and personal trajectories. YPAR was an academic and political education in every sense that we used to engage our students’ sense of agency. Therefore, as we move forward we need to be creative in further

developing this pedagogical tool known as YPAR as well as continue to come up with other vehicles that may lead us down the same path towards youth engagement and empowerment.

Another lesson that I learned as an educator is that in taking up the role of a critical educator, we must constantly question and challenge our own practices to gauge its effectiveness. There were moments during this year and even now as I continue to do this program that I had to question whether my pedagogy truly reflected a problem-posing pedagogy. In being a veteran teacher in the program for four years now, I constantly questioned whether or not Mr. Derrick and I were scaffolding the learning process for the students. In all honesty, there were times where I felt we fell into a banking model mode of learning in just having the students do tasks to get the job done. Having students do tasks is not problematic. However, when there was a lack of reflection about the significance of the work, it could be easily argued that our practices mirrored traditional methods of teaching that we were trying to get away from. Let's be honest, apprenticing as researchers was a difficult process in which the students needed time and creative activities to process the whole experience. Knowing that the research topics that are studied in YPAR projects are complex and sensitive subject material to tackle, an effective pedagogue must facilitate a scaffolded learning process. Therefore, my recommendation for those teachers that want to do this in their after school spaces or classes, is to be creative with the activities that you develop to get the work done. Additionally, within this problem-posing model there must be opportunities for individual or collective action to take place. FSP can serve as a model of how to do YPAR work, but it is important to understand that the heart of the work comes from what both teacher(s) and students bring to the table.

My final recommendation for teachers is to actually realize that this type of work has to be developed and executed with what Duncan-Andrade and Morrell call “revolutionary love.”

Revolutionary love is the love that is strong enough to bring about radical change in individual students, classrooms, school systems, and the larger society that controls them...It looks like endless dedication, an unyielding belief in the brilliance and potential of every student, and the commitment to stop at nothing to get kids to learn. It demands the energy and passion to present learning as an amazing opportunity for young people to prepare themselves to be engaged citizens and social actors. This something else is defined as never giving up. It is a continual search for more effective ways to help young people to learn and to demonstrate their learning in academically and socially powerful ways. This something else is revolutionary love. When teachers see revolutionary change in their students, classrooms, and schools, then they will know that they are practicing that sort of love.

Although Duncan-Andrade and Morrell argued that revolutionary love should not be defined by its inputs but rather the outcomes, I feel that we can still take note of the extra-curricular things that Mr. Derrick, Mr. York, and I did that may have resulted in the outcomes I showed in this research project. Like Lisa Delpit (1995) argues in her work, we need to see our students not as other people's children, but as our own and treat them like our own. Therefore, we provided our students with food during our weekly meetings, gave them rides to meetings and events and back home, and most importantly, mentored them academically and personally. Duncan-Andrade (2010) in his Note to Educators talk at Harvard argued that in order to effectively work with students, we must address the basic needs of students such as food, safety, and well-being. Take for example, we provided the students with food because we wanted to make sure that they were physically nourished as much as we tried to address their mental and personal needs. Additionally, we regularly drove our students home to make sure that they get home safe especially during the nights in which we worked late at school or the university. Some may argue that this was getting too personal with the students and may question the objectiveness of our pedagogical practices. However, we believe that to do the transformative type of work that we engage in, we had to struggle right next to the students and commit to taking care of them.

Lastly, the final piece of this revolutionary love we had for our students manifested itself in our unyielding expectation of their excellence. We accepted nothing less than excellence from them in their work and in their sense of being. But at the same time, we also wanted them to expect nothing less of themselves. Each and everyone of the students were brilliant, compassionate, and critical individuals and we made sure that they lived it. As we have seen in chapter four, the FSP Panther students taught others about their research findings with conviction, passion, and expertise, and no one can ever take that away from them. However, I reiterate that this was only possible through a collective struggle. Ultimately, there was many times during the year that I referred to my students as family, because to me they really were. Although we were all from various races and cultures, we all learned how to act as a community of practice that strived collectively towards realities of social justice. Therefore, my demand for folks interested in facilitating this type of work is to really internalize the fact that teaching YPAR and engaging students' pedagogy of agency can only be accomplished through humanizing practices that expect nothing less than academic and personal excellence.

Recommendations for Future Research

We as educational researchers need to continue scholarship on YPAR and youth agency. As much as I have learned from the countless projects that have been popping up across the nation over the last couple of years, some may still question the legitimacy of youth research. Therefore, we need to keep developing research that challenge the status quo of traditional research methodologies and that legitimizes youth voice, experience, and inquiry. The more we continue to develop this field of scholarship, the educational community will nonetheless have to acknowledge the effectiveness of this work on youth engagement and empowerment.

Furthermore, what are much needed in this field of scholarship are models for best practices and curriculum development. Since most of my colleagues and I have been doing this work in FSP for several years now, we have been collectively developing articles that talk about the significance of student research in FSP, our experiences as educators and researchers, and our analyses of our practices. Conversely though, we would learn tremendously from the methods and best practices of other groups that have also developed YPAR curriculums. One of the mottos of the Black Panthers was “each one, teach one.” Therefore, continuing to build literature on our practices and processes can act as a foundation for others to build off of.

Lastly, as much as research about our different projects at the local level need to be highlighted, missing from the discourse still is empirical research on how YPAR can be utilized to address inequitable educational and social conditions at the national level. In FSP at Panther High the students interrogated the localized issues occurring at their school. However, the fact of the matter is that young people in urban areas must be going through the similar experiences. Therefore, as young people are able to conceive the immediate world around them, how can YPAR further push young people to be active agents outside their immediate conceptions of community and advocate for other youth going through similar struggles in different geographical contexts? This question leads me to push for a national council of youth research. As we have seen the power of young people doing research on the immediate issues that they experience in their local environments, I know we can find ways the bring youth together to interrogate common educational and social issues experienced on a national scale. Therefore, our next line of research should examine the process of how we actually go about connecting the different groups around the nation doing this type of work and develop a national collective of youth researchers and intellectuals. As the youth try to impact what is happening in their

schools and communities in their immediate environments, I envision that this national collective will have the capacity to impact broader social and educational reform. This is the future of this work and scholarship.

Demands for Educational Reform

In looking towards the future of this work, educational policies and reform should also start looking at the applicability and implementation of this work in the regular school curriculum and standards. Although this was a hybrid space, there are many characteristics and practices of the FSP after school program that can be implemented into standard curriculum. As I showed in chapter four, a few of the activities that we engaged such as analyzing current data sets addressed some of the Statistics and Probability curriculum standards. Furthermore, even Mr. Derrick and a few other FSP instructors have found ways to make research inquiries a part of their curriculum to where students have these projects as their final culminating assignment. This type of work would also be another research topic that needs further examination. But all in all, as current educational policies elicit the measure of test scores maybe we can find ways to develop the tools that assess learning through projects like portfolios and presentations that can also gauge the acquisition of academic skills and literacies. I argue that this is the future of education. Therefore, we must find ways to create policies that legitimize and broaden this work so we can engage more students than we have the capacity to handle in an after school program.

Limitations of the Study

While this was an intimate and close examination of the FSP after school program at Panther High School that yielded much valuable information for YPAR scholarship and critical youth studies, I must also recognize the limitations of this dissertation project. I recognize that

my sample size was relatively small in examining the process of only five high school students and their three adult teacher allies. Some may question the effectiveness of generalizing the findings of this research to the broader studies of urban youth and urban education. However, in knowing the power of qualitative research I feel that I have provided a deep enough analysis of these students' complex processes of conducting critical research to where one can use this study as a foundation to gauge effectiveness in developing more spaces like FSP. On the other hand, I do feel that a broader scale, well-funded research project should look at the FSP program as a whole and follow the actual academic trajectories of all the students into college and beyond. Such a research project would yield even more information on how these students' sense of agency further developed even after the program.

Along these lines of gauging students' sense of agency over the long term, I must also be upfront that this research project was biased in that I highlighted the moments that were most powerful to me during the school year. There may have been more powerful moments of the students' self-actualizations that I may have not caught with my research methods. Therefore, for future research projects like this study, I recommend that the youth researchers have more say in the data collection, data analysis, and implications part of the project. This would definitely give a richer, more encompassing analysis of what youth agency is, has the potential to be, and how it is attained. Overall, with more time and human and monetary capital, I think we can further expand on the concept of pedagogy of agency. In retrospect, this dissertation research can serve as the foundation for the marrying of YPAR and the concept of youth agency.

Conclusion

I feel that this research comes at a critical time in American society. During the data analysis process of this project, I witnessed the wake of revolutions in this country and around

the world. In Egypt there was a national revolution led by young people that overthrew the Mubarak dictatorship that ruled the country for thirty years. In the United States, we saw the Occupy Wall Street movement spread like wild fire across the country, drawing the line between the 1% of wealthy people that run this country and the 99% that were fed up from being oppressed by their decisions, policies, and politics. Through all these movements, I saw with my own eyes people collectively using their sense of agency to awaken and inform the broader public about the issues impacting their lives: from lack of effective affordable health care to the housing crisis of people losing their homes to dehumanizing and irrelevant educational policies and structures to the refusal of basic human rights. I argue that YPAR projects are part of this movement. These projects are about giving sense of awareness and power to one of the most marginalized and dispossessed group of people in our society, Black and Brown youth living in urban areas.

In “The Ballot or the Bullet” speech, Malcolm X professed these words:

Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern, you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude, it changes your behavior pattern and then you go on into some action. As long as you gotta sit-down philosophy, you’ll have a sit-down thought pattern, and as long as you think that old sit-down thought you’ll be in some kind of sit-down action... Well you and I been sitting long enough, and it’s time today for us to start doing some standing, and some fighting to back that up.

In the spirit of Malcolm X, we must stand up alongside our young people and collectively change our philosophies, develop our critical consciousness, and move towards action to change the oppressive perspectives and conditions in America. The only way to change this society is if we do it collectively and allow our young people to contribute their ideas and experiences. I conclude this dissertation with an excerpt from Lupe Fiasco’s (2012) prolific rap lyrics.

Yeah, the people, united, will never be defeated
And on the People's Mic this forever be repeated
Whose streets? Our streets, it'll never be deleted
No matter how many cops that you send to try and beat it
This is revolution in the making
A ragtag movement set to takeover the nation
Now isn't that fun?
You just wanna make the world better, isn't that young?
Well, blessings to the youth then
And don't stop, until they let the truth in
Once there, never let it leave
And protect it, they'll catch it and never set it free
And every set is free
Blood sweat and tears, no place I'd rather be
So, let's occupy Wall Street, all day, all week

This world ends, this world ends
This world ends, this world ends
Now, now, now, now, now, now, now, now

Although this track, *The End of the World*, is considered to be an anthem dedicated to the Occupy Wall Street movement, I feel that it is very relevant to the cause of this research. Lupe pushes us to imagine that this world, this reality of racism and deficit perspectives of youth of color and oppressed people must end. The oppressive conditions in urban low-income areas have created too many casualties in schools and in the communities that, if we are true to our motives of social justice, we need to end the occupation of our students' minds and lives. Like Lupe says, "don't stop, until they let the truth in. Once there, never let it leave. And protect it, they'll catch it and never set it free." In connecting these words to YPAR and the development of critical consciousness, once young people know the truth they can never set it free because it will forever be engrained in their minds and practices. This is what agency is about, finding one's purpose. In retrospect, the most important lesson I learned this year in FSP was the work much more than preparing our students for academics. Our mission really was about helping our

students find their purpose. Yes we apprentice our students to become effective researchers. Yes we help them develop the skills and literacies to get them through high school and college. But when it came down to it what we really did in FSP was help our youth realize their purpose and their passions. And being an educator for more than ten years, it has been my experience that when young people find what they are passionate about nothing can stand in their way.

The students' agency did not end with their research projects or in the FSP space. Rather, it marked the beginning of a self-actualization and change from within that extended beyond themselves. Through YPAR, the Panther students developed the skills and knowledge to take on the social and political issues that impact the lives of urban youth in their community. They actualized their potentials in being pedagogues and will continue to teach agency to their peers and the next generation. Their passion for the work reminded me it is not about the money, the accolades, nor the letters behind one's name that is going to change the lived condition of oppressed people. But rather it was about the passion, the heart and soul that the young scholars brought to this space that will actually change the realities that we live in. And as educators it is our duty to struggle right next to them in taking back their power—the power of young people that has been hidden behind deficit perspectives and oppressive condition. It is a beautiful struggle but once everyone finds their agency life becomes worth fighting and living for. All power to the people.

APPENDIX A

High School Student Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Initial Interview

Topic 1: Relationship to the Freedom Scholars Program (FSP):

- When did you first hear about FSP and how did you get invited to join?
- What do you like about being in FSP? What don't you like?

Topic 2: The FSP learning process and conducting research:

- What is one thing that you have learned since being in FSP?
- Has the work you've done in FSP impacted any other parts of your life? If so what has it impacted and how?
- What have you learned from doing research about your schools and communities so far?
- What is your current research about? What have you learned so far about your research topic?
- What has been one challenge in being in FSP?

Topic 3: Presenting research findings to different audiences:

- You have a lot of presentation coming up. What are your fears about the presentations? What are your expectations?

Topic 4: Student's understanding of agency:

- What is your definition of agency?
- What's an example of agency that you have seen?
- What are some instances where you felt that you have acted upon your agency?

APPENDIX B

High School Student Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Interview Pre and Post-Presentations

Topic 1: Student thoughts and feelings before presenting:

- How are you feeling before this presentation?

- What do you want to teach people today? What is one thing that you want them to take away from your presentation?

Topic 2: Student thoughts and feelings after presenting:

- How does it feel to present your research to this specific audience?
- What was your main purpose for presenting in front of this audience?
- What do you think people took away from your presentations?
- How do you think they responded to your presentation?
- What is one thing that you think was good about your presentation?
- What is one thing that you want to work on for next time?

APPENDIX C

Adult FSP Participant Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Initial Interview

Topic 1: Relationship to the Freedom Scholars Program (FSP):

- When did you first hear about FSP and how did you get invited to join?
- What did you think of FSP when you first heard about it and why did you decide to join?
- What did you think about FSP when you first got involved in it?
- What do you like about being a teacher in the FSP? What don't you like?

Topic 2: Relationship with student researchers:

- How did you pick your students to be in FSP?
- How has it been working with the returning students and the new ones?

Topic 3: Identifying students' agency and personal and academic development at the beginning of the school year:

- For the returning students, how have they changed over the two years that you have been working with them?
- What is your understanding of the students' development and sense of agency so far?
- Tell me one story that you feel that shows the agency of students.
- What have you learned from your students?

Topic 4: Goals for the school year in FSP:

- What are your goals for the students this year?
- What are goals for yourself this year?

APPENDIX D

Adult FSP Participant Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Follow-up Interview

Topic 1: Identifying student agency and personal and academic development at the end of the school year:

- Having been a co-facilitator, how have you seen the students develop over the past school year?
- Can you please give me examples or stories of how you have seen the students enact their agency? If so, what are they?

Topic 2: Reflections about student impact on self:

- What have you learned from the students? What have they taught you?
- How have the students impacted your own ideologies and practices?

Topic 3: Reflections about FSP process:

- Overall, what are your reflections about the school year? What were two strengths? What were two things that we could work on?
- Where do we go from here? What are our next steps and how can we expand on what we have developed?
- Generally, what has this process taught you about working with youth from an urban area?
- Lastly, what is one thing that you have learned from this year's experience?

APPENDIX E

Semi-Structured Focus Group Protocol for End of the Year Focus Group for High School and Adult FSP Participants

Topic 1: The FSP learning process and conducting research:

- What is one thing that you have learned since being in FSP?
- Has the work you've done in FSP impacted any other parts of your life? If so what has it impacted and how?
- What do you guys feel about the work and the research that you did throughout the year?

Topic 2: Presenting research findings to different audiences:

- What do you think people took away from your presentations?
- Having done all those presentations, how has your identity as a student changed? Identity as a member of your community?

Topic 3: Adult reflections about the process:

- How has your identity changed as an adult in the program? Teacher? Researcher?
- What are your reflections about the past presentations?

Topic 4: Future steps of our process:

- Having done all this work, where do we go from here?
- What further actions and concrete ways can we expand on what we have developed together?

APPENDIX F

Code List

Action – Creating theory

Action – Teaching

Agency – Adult

Agency – Advocate

Agency – Civic Agency
Agency – Challenge adults
Agency – Collective action
Agency – Creating awareness
Agency – Demanding
Agency – Discipline
Agency – Foresight
Agency – Gaining skills
Agency – Hard work
Agency – Identity transformation
Agency – Individual action
Agency – Resistance
Agency – Sense of
Agency – Speaking out
Agency – Youth
Challenging
Critical consciousness – Awareness of inequalities
Critical consciousness – Critique of education
Critical consciousness – Critique of lived experience
Critical consciousness – Critique of self
Critical consciousness – Critique of school policy
Critical consciousness – Development of
Critical consciousness – Understanding Power
Deficit perspectives of community
Deficit perspectives of youth
Definition of agency
Engaged
Empowering education
Expectations
Feeling Marginalized
Growth – Of students
Growth – As an educator
Growth – As a researcher
Growth – Ownership
Growth – Confidence
Humanization
Indignation
Inspired
Inspirations
Motivations
Pedagogy – Awareness of being a teacher
Pedagogy – FSP
Pedagogy – Relevant learning
Pedagogy – Teachers teaching students
Pedagogy – Students teaching adults
Pedagogy – students teaching peers

Presenting – Being confident
Presenting – Being felt
Presenting – Being prepared
Presenting – Engaging audience
Presenting – Practice
Presenting – Teaching audience
Presenting – Nervous
Presenting – Speaking from the heart
Resisting deficit perspectives
School site
Shamed
Transformative resistance

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