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PUBLIC GOOD AND COMMON GROUND:
WRITING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT INTO COMMUNITY-CAMPUS
PARTNERSHIPS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Education

By

Deanna L. Fracul

May 2023

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Deanna L. Fracul

2023

PUBLIC GOOD AND COMMON GROUND:
WRITING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT INTO COMMUNITY-CAMPUS
PARTNERSHIPS

By

Deanna L. Fracul

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ABSTRACT

PUBLIC GOOD AND COMMON GROUND: WRITING DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT INTO COMMUNITY-CAMPUS PARTNERSHIPS

By

Deanna L. Fracul

May 2023

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Rick McCown

This dissertation focuses on identifying essential characteristics of initiatives that build cooperative relationships and solidarity to advance democratically engaged community-campus partnerships. As such, it involves understanding the conditions that undermine these relationships, the critical practices that strengthen them, and the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them. Fundamentally, this research is interested in explicating what worked and did not within Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne University, an after-school mentoring program that evolved into a community-engaged writing initiative and dialogic space. This qualitative research project utilizes modified appreciative inquiry questions. Emerging from organizational studies, appreciative inquiry is an asset-based approach to facilitating institutional change (Coghlan et al., 2003). The process begins with an analysis of the elements of an

organization that are most effective and then considers how those positive attributes might be expanded. As Ashford and Parker explain, appreciative inquiry functions through a process of “discovery and valuing, envisioning, dialogue and co-constructing the future” (2001, p.4). The analysis showed that participants found the vulnerability and resultant empathy shared to be most personally and professionally impactful. These sentiments contributed to a sense of community within the experience and allowed for difficult conversations requiring deep listening that spurred individual and collective action within and beyond the group.

DEDICATION

To my father and friend, Donald Joseph Fracul, in loving memory.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I want to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my committee members Dr. Rick McCown, Dr. Gretchen Generett, and Dr. Amy Olson, for their thoughtful feedback and for sharing their considerable knowledge and experience with me in support of this project. I would also like to thank my committee members for allowing my defense to be a celebration of my learning and a moment that I will never forget. Additionally, I am grateful to my original committee Chair, Dr. Connie Moss, for getting me as far along as she did before her retirement. She consistently believed in my abilities, and I appreciated her advice. To the focus group members, I am deeply indebted to you for your participation in my research.

Specifically, I want to thank Leon Ford for bringing the Voices Project to Duquesne University. This dissertation is only possible with you. We built something extraordinary together that appears to have lived on in ways we never imagined. My experience working with you as a visionary leader and with your remarkable mentees has forever changed me. Our collective work around that table in the basement of the Student Union has had a tremendous ripple effect across our campus and through the community. More importantly, I will always cherish our longstanding friendship, and I truly look forward to developing the Voices Project 2.0 with you.

I cannot begin to express my thanks to all the Voices Project mentees for their enthusiastic participation, authentic vulnerability, and commitment to creating a socially just world. I look forward to continuing to support your work and collaborating with you in the future. Additionally, I am incredibly grateful to the community partners, Duquesne

faculty, students, and staff who agreed to participate in this initiative and, more importantly, invited others to join us.

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To my three fantastic children, Carter, Greyson, and Esme Fracul-Conti, my participation in this process has not always been easy on you. Still, I want you to understand how much I have adored your hugs, appreciated your encouragement, and enjoyed your humor along the way. I could have done without the constant interruptions, though. I love all of you more than you could ever know. Thank you so much for choosing me to be your mom. Our little family is my most valuable lifelong project. You make me proud for many reasons, and I cannot wait to see what exciting accomplishments are next for each of you. You are loved!

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Chapter 1: Statement of the Problem

This dissertation focuses on identifying essential characteristics of initiatives that build cooperative relationships and solidarity to advance democratically engaged community-campus partnerships. As such, it involves understanding the conditions that undermine these relationships, the critical practices that strengthen them, and the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them. Fundamentally, this research is interested in explicating what worked and did not within Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne University, an after-school mentoring program that evolved into a community-engaged writing initiative and dialogic space.

The work presented here is justified by and offered in support of the notion that operating within a democratic framework of community engagement can catalyze both personal and intellectual development that, in turn, can establish democracy as a way of living rather than just a political system (Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton, 2009; McGowan, Bonefas, and Siracusa, 2013). To support the development and growth of an engaged democracy, academics and community partners must engage today's youth in creative opportunities for "collaborative knowledge construction" (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 9). By cultivating a capacity to engage with texts across differences, we develop an ever-deepening understanding of self and society. As we grow to understand ourselves and social issues better, we are experiencing a socialization "into an interpretively competent ethos of interaction in which the opinions and interests of others are respected, grappled with, internalized, and responded to through practice" (McGowan et al., 2013, p. 176). Perhaps most importantly, the program under analysis is offered as an exemplar of how universities can cultivate this ethos of interaction as they attempt to shift from the

traditional structures of civic engagement toward democratic engagement where "students learn about democracy by acting democratically" within an "ecosystem of knowledge" that "seeks the public good *with* the public not merely for the public" (Saltmarsh et al., 2009, p. 9-11).

Social, Cultural and Historical Perspectives on the Problem

An ongoing issue in higher education is the advancement of community-campus engagement that promotes and maintains democratic practices. In 2009, Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton offered democratic engagement as an alternative to civic engagement in higher education. Their purpose was to provide a framework for reciprocal community partnerships where knowledge production is inclusive, collaborative, as well as problem-oriented and results in community change. Next, Dostilio (2014) sought to explain the factors that facilitate the roles and processes of democratically engaged community-university partnerships. Through this study, she uncovered three factors that interact with varying degrees, and they include social, political and organizational conditions, partnership learning interactions, and stakeholder attributes. Subsequently, Saltmarsh, Janke, and Clayton (2015) offered a model for identifying transformative institutional initiatives that are inherently democratic. Specifically, they identified deep (asset-based, reciprocal, critically reflective, impactful, continuously improving), pervasive (spread into all corners and dimensions of the life of the campus), and integrated (aligned and intertwined with the full range of campus priorities) characteristics of service-learning and community engagement that signal an institution's transformational change (2015, p. 124). For Saltmarsh et al., a transformed and democratically engaged institution will consider "itself as a part of communities, as

one of many players involved in networked, multi-directional systems for co-creating knowledge, policy, and practice” (2015, p. 126).

Later, Tania Mitchell (2016a) asked, “So what does a community engagement practice that is not just vocal about the change our democracy needs, but active and engaged in work that bolsters that transformation—that leverages the resources and capacity of our institutions, its stakeholders, and our communities in actual work that contests power to change the situations and circumstances that perpetuate inequality—what does that look like” (p. 348). In a follow-up piece, Mitchell (2017) offers an intersectional approach to community engagement as a step toward democratic change. Specifically, she posits that the central principles of intersectionality (i.e., the notion that identities are tied to larger systems of power and oppression, so they cannot be viewed as singular or discrete) can be used to facilitate a model of community engagement where overlapping structures of inequality can be addressed to make meaningful change. She explains that community engagement often begins with the identification of a problem in a community and a presumption that universities can address and potentially improve the problem. Unfortunately, this perspective is often grounded in deficit-based thinking, privilege, representations of whiteness, as well as a disregard for local efforts and community knowledge. Beyond this, universities tend to get positive attention and accolades for short-term efforts that would have been impossible without the local community efforts that preceded them.

Mitchell further explains that “community engagement projects frequently fail to recognize the intersectional—the multiple, interconnected, and compounding—social aspects shaping the concerns highlighted and targeted through these efforts” (2017, p.37).

As a result, engagement initiatives often narrowly focus on specific issues within the community and they ignore how these issues are mirrored by, and may be, the result of, or at least connected to, what is happening within the university. From this perspective, community engagement efforts tend to concentrate on one factor related to the problem and ignore the reality that there are a multitude of systems of power and oppression that overlap and bring problems to bare for individuals in a variety of ways based on their unique combinations of statuses such as race, gender, and class.

An alternative strategy for community engagement that prioritizes intersectionality will highlight the mechanisms and interconnected structures at the root of social inequality. Mitchell argues that an “intersectional community engagement approach is intentional in the exploration of social concerns through multiple dimensions of identity to ensure the that the problem is more fully understood” (2017, p. 40). Additionally, intersectional community engagement accounts for a community’s assets and considers how they can be leveraged towards significant social progress. Furthermore, in another piece, she works to establish democratic community engagement as a well-balanced dialogue that understands: how students are connected to their experiences, precisely what their engagement is, and the meaning they make from those experiences (Mitchell, 2016b, pp. 258-259). Finally, Mitchell (2016b) points out that undergraduate and graduate community-engaged experiences should be analyzed to understand democratic outcomes from the student perspective.

Elsewhere, Mitchell and Soria (2016) offer a quantitative analysis of undergraduate experiences with community engagement. Their goal in this study is to determine how students understand their community-engaged learning experiences while

also determining if these opportunities provoked the sort of reflection as well as social perspective taking that is essential for intersectionality and leads them to work for social change on and off campus. Specifically, they were considering these results as social change outcomes. Their findings pointed out that students taking part in collective action and participatory democratic community engagement projects were more likely to reflect on the experiences in relation to the communities where they were working as well as in their milieus. Additionally, their results demonstrated that students participating in community-engaged learning experiences focused on social justice and social change were most likely to carry that ethos back to the university and put it to work on campus and beyond.

Altogether, Mitchell is laying out elements of an architecture for transforming universities, from teaching and research to learning and personal growth to support our experiment in democracy. Toward this end, she accepts a definition of social justice as both a process and a goal. As a goal, social justice means a “world where the rights of all are valued, respected, and accepted and when access to the opportunities and resources necessary to be your best self are unrestricted” (Mitchell, 2013, p. 264). As a process, she recognizes social justice as the behaviors, encounters, and relationships that form community engagement. This entails identifying and working towards “a vision of communities that can be seen as *just* while simultaneously working each day to treat each other justly and model relationships and interactions indicative of a more *just* world” (Mitchell, 2013, p. 264). Mitchell goes on to explain that this sort of social justice-oriented community engagement requires a reciprocity in facilitating the projects that respects the knowledge and abilities of everyone involved, cultivating authentic

relationships where we can move from listening to understanding, and developing interpersonal connections that extend beyond the boundaries of an engagement project and academic roles.

Overview of the Unmet Demand for After-School Programs among Underserved Youth

While this dissertation is primarily focused on the advancement of community-campus engagement that promotes and maintains democratic practices, the case study being presented is of an after-school mentoring program that evolved into a community-engaged writing initiative and dialogic space. So, it is essential to understand the overall significance and current state of after-school programs. Specifically, this section addresses the unmet demand, social justice implications, and benefits of after-school programs for underserved youth.

The demand for high-quality after-school programs among marginalized youth is not being met. After-school program advocates argue that marginalized youth deserve to experience the same opportunities and benefits as their economically advantaged peers. For instance, Halpern (2000) draws attention to the unique qualities of after-school programs that can contribute to the lives of marginalized youth. He explains:

My basic argument is that low-income children as all children need times and places in their lives where the agenda is modest, if not held at bay; where the emotional temperature is low, and acceptance is generous; where the learning is self-directed and structured to be enjoyable; where talents can be identified and nurtured; and where possible identities can be explored without risk of failure or ridicule (p. 186).

The need for these sorts of programs is an important issue of educational inequity that requires advocacy at the local and national levels because after-school programs have been found to provide marginalized youth with social/emotional, prevention, and academic benefits (Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2007). Weitzman, Mijanovich, Silver, and Brazill (2008) note that policymakers and practitioners have responded to unmet demand in various ways with mixed results, but it appears that reforms are primarily based on their beliefs as well as false assumptions about the needs of youth and their families. Increasing the supply is an oversimplified solution that will not solve this problem; it requires intentional programming focused on the practical challenges, needs, and interests of marginalized youth and their families.

While Weitzman et al. (2008) argue that the demand for after-school programs has been overestimated; they also acknowledge that marginalized urban youth consistently experience significant unmet demand. They defined unmet demand as “a function of low utilization and dissatisfaction with one’s current arrangement,” and that dissatisfaction should “stem from something that can be addressed through changes in policy or programs” (p. 3). The extant literature points to a number of reasons for this problem, which demonstrates that innovative and multifaceted action by leaders in the field is necessary to address this inequity in after-school programming.

Specifically, research suggests that the unmet demand in after-school programs for marginalized youth is partially driven by practical issues such as the lack of accessibility to convenient public transportation, unaffordable participation fees, as well as parents and youth being uninformed about programs (Afterschool

Alliance, 2014; Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Seligson & Marx, 1989; Weitzman et al., 2008). Another challenging barrier to participation is the lack of quality programs that consider youth interests (Gardner, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009). In their examination of out-of-school time programs, Bodilly and Beckett (2005) recommend that policymakers and program advocates “remain skeptical of claims about pent-up demand for programs” and instead suggest “concentrating on how to improve the quality of offerings by existing programs” (p. xvii).

Social Justice Implications of Unmet Demands in After-School Programs

The problem of unmet demand in after-school programming for marginalized youth has significant social justice implications for local as well as national community stakeholders. For instance, Halpern (2000) reports that youth in “self-care” are known to have lower grades, fewer social skills, more anxiety, feel lonely or bored, watch too much television, and exercise less (p.192). Moreover, programs operate during the time of day when many marginalized youth are left unsupervised at home while their parents are working (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2009). Some experts argue that large numbers of parents are content with their children not participating in after-school programs (Weitzman et al., 2008).

Here in Allegheny County, 14% or 23,383 children are left unsupervised after school (Afterschool Alliance, 2020). This statistic is concerning because participants in after-school programs are being provided with physical and psychological safety during a time of day when youth are at the most significant risk of victimization or delinquency (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2009). Moreover, Kahne, O’Brien, Brown, and Quinn (2001) contend that the “Structured, safe, and enjoyable contexts that after-

school programs provide youth with more than encouragement to “just say no” to risky experiences—they provide something to which youth can “say yes”” (p. 423).

Interestingly, Anderson-Butcher, Stetler, and Midle (2006) call for more innovative out-of-school time programming that is not used as a diversion from delinquent behavior.

Schutz (2006) also argues that educators should be seeking more innovative and relevant approaches to school engagement with communities but adds that those initiatives should be “grounded in an understanding of the challenges facing inner-city areas in the United States” (pp. 695-696).

The Benefits of After-School Programs for Marginalized Youth

In 2010, Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan conducted a meta-analysis that involved the evaluation of 69 different after-school programs that attempted to promote personal and social skills in youth. They found that compared to the controls, youth who participated in those programs showed significant increases in self-perceptions and bonding to school, positive social behaviors, school grades and academic achievement, and significant reductions in problem behaviors (Durlak et al., 2010). In another study of an after-school program in Chicago, researchers found that youth who participated in the program had improved grades as well as graduation rates and reduced dropout rates in comparison with non-participants (Goerge, Cusick, Wasserman, & Gladden, 2007).

In their longitudinal study of low-income urban youth who participate in after-school programs, Posner and Vandell (1999) found that youth who attend formal programs spend more time on academic and extracurricular activities, while youth in informal care spend more time watching TV and hanging out. More importantly, they discovered that a record of participation starting in third grade positively contributed to

the emotional adjustment of youth in fifth grade (Posner & Vandell, 1999). In their ecological analysis of after-school program participation for first through third-grade students living in low-income urban neighborhoods, Mahoney, Lord, and Carryl (2005) demonstrate that youth involved in highly engaging after-school programs show significant differences in their reading achievement, the expectancy of success, and effectance motivation compared to their peers in less formal after-school care.

Clearly, the benefits of after-school programs translate to the in-school context. Furthermore, Bathgate and Silva (2010) report that after-school programs are particularly beneficial to schools given that they can offer more diverse learning opportunities. This is especially important for schools with increasing accountability demands, overburdened teachers, and limited budgets (Bathgate & Silva, 2010).

The Importance of Being Beyond the School During After-School

Attempts by policymakers and practitioners to increase marginalized youth's access to after-school programs have sometimes been misguided. For instance, many cities around the country have been allocating funds to school-based programs because they naturally reduce barriers and offer easy access to students (Kahne et al., 2001). However, "community-based programs tend to attract youth [i.e., African-American boys] who rate their school context lower than those who attend after-school programs based at their own schools" (Kahne et al., 2001, p. 439). After-school programs that take place beyond traditional school walls are known to positively impact marginalized youths' academic achievement as well as their social well-being. Bathgate and Silva (2010) note that effective community-based after-school programs are known for "tapping students' individual interests and cultural backgrounds to make learning relevant

and engaging” (p. 67). Additionally, Fashola (2003) found a decrease in the achievement gap for black male students who participated in community-based after-school programs in comparison to their white counterparts.

The Rationale for After-School Creative and Literary Arts Programs as a Template

In a study of creative arts after-school programs conducted by the Wallace Foundation (2013), they recognized the need to re-orient the conversation from the supply of programs to addressing consumer demands. They conducted interviews with youth, parents, and experts and found that creative arts programs using best practices in the field are particularly good at engaging youth, and they tend to retain their participation (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Interestingly, they also note that high-quality creative arts programs are often in short supply and typically have waiting lists (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Some might argue that creative arts programs are not the answer to equal access, but experts suggest that they could at least offer a template for programs to follow.

Heath, Soep, and Roach (1998) published a ten-year study of after-school programs, revealing that creative arts programs effectively engage low-income youth. Compared to non-participants, the youth studied showed greater motivation, persistence, critical analysis, and planning skills. Additionally, they identified building relationships and partnerships as well as a commitment to community services as hallmarks of effective and successful community-based arts programs (Heath et al., 1998). In their examination of culturally based after-school arts programming for low-income students, Mason and Chuang (2001) found that participants showed a statically significant increase in self-esteem, social skills, and leadership skills than non-participants. More recently, in

their discussion of the differences between school-based and out-of-school time (OST) art education programs, Green and Kindseth (2011) note that the way youth success is measured in school does not adequately reflect their achievements in after-school programs. While youth's skills are being developed, there are what Green and Kindseth (2011) refer to as "intangibles", which include "representation of identity, interpersonal collaboration, personal resiliency-present in the artwork, and art making process" (p. 338). According to Green and Kindseth (2011), these previously untapped attributes are considered immeasurable results.

More specifically, community-based writing programs for underserved youth have been found to develop student confidence, learning, and personal growth (Hummel, 2014). Research on writing partnerships between universities and their communities is similarly compelling. For instance, in an evaluation of a 10-week workshop where college students and low-income youth spent time writing together, participants described the development of self-esteem, self-efficacy, social support, and cultural connection (Chandler, 2002). Moreover, opportunities connecting older underserved youth with college students reengage them in learning and inspire them to explore future opportunities (Allen, Almeida, and Steinberg, 2004).

Local Contextual Perspectives on the Problem

In 2014, the Heinz Foundation commissioned a special report from the Afterschool Alliance. They found that in Allegheny County, twenty-eight percent of students participate in after-school programs. This participation rate is much higher than both the state and national average. However, the parents of over 90,000 of the county's children not currently enrolled report that they would enroll their child in an after-school

program if one were available. Furthermore, the Afterschool Alliance (2014) reports that four in five parents in Allegheny County agree that after-school programs help give working parents peace of mind about their children while they are at work.

While after-school programs that take place beyond traditional school walls can be incredibly impactful for marginalized youth, in Pennsylvania, only fourteen out of sixty-four programs awarded 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC) grants by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for 2014-2017 were community-based (Perez, p.13, 2014). The federal government established the 21st CCLC grants to support community learning centers that provide academic enrichment for youth who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools. While other funding sources are available to community-based programs, this is an example of financial support being funneled away from programs that appeal to marginalized youth.

One local example of a highly successful community-based after-school program is the Manchester Craftsman's Guild (MCG), an after-school visual arts program for teens founded by Pittsburgh native Bill Strickland. The MCG started as a partnership with a local school and while they still collaborate with schools, the program runs as a freestanding facility that has even been replicated in other cities. Green and Kindseth (2011) point to several areas where the MCG excels with their students including, "opportunities for teens to work creatively" and "aiming to develop their capacities to act with a sense of agency and vision in their lives" (p. 339). Furthermore, they note that after-school programs like the one at the MCG provide youth participants with opportunities to shape their own experiences and gain leadership skills they may not acquire in school (Green & Kindseth, 2011). Finally, the high level of youth interest in

MCG's programs is a local example of an established trend where demand is likely not being met for quality after-school creative arts programs (Heath, Soep, & Roach, 1998).

Evidence of the democratic engagement framework (Saltmarsh et al., 2009) can be found in the work of the Community Literacy Center (CLC). The CLC is a long-term collaboration between Carnegie Mellon University and the Community House located on the North Side of Pittsburgh. The work of the CLC is primarily situated around community engagement, intercultural inquiry, and social action (Flower, 2008). Through this program, youth participants develop literacy practices that evolve into intercultural discourses of inquiry and result in public dialogues, videos, and articles that promote social change (Flower, 2008).

Stakeholder Perceptions and Experiences

Early in the development of this project, a faculty member who works with marginalized youth mentioned that specific low-income communities in Pittsburgh have highly organized leadership. As a result, youth living in those neighborhoods have greater access to programs. However, other faculty members have been surprised to hear that there is an unmet demand for after-school programs in Allegheny County. In preparation for this work, I spoke with Pittsburgh Public School teacher who expressed concerns about marginalized students feeling uncomfortable attending a program at a predominately white university. She also brought up the issue of transportation being a constant obstacle for participants as well as high fees for families. I assured her that our program would be free and that our community partners have access to public transportation at a minimum. Additionally, an administrator from Duquesne pointed out that this community-university partnership aligns with the university's goals and

the Spiritan Charism.

I have found that community stakeholders are less focused on the supply side of after-school programs and are far more interested in addressing the immediate needs of youth in their neighborhoods. During my meetings with community stakeholders, I learned that finding creative outlets for middle school students in their neighborhoods is particularly challenging. Others have expressed that opportunities for youth to write would provide positive outlets for them to express their feelings of anger or frustration as well as offer platforms for activism. More specifically, one community leader explained that older youth have tremendous stories of loss, hope, and resilience that they need to share with others. When I asked community stakeholders about youth from their neighborhoods attending a Duquesne after-school program, they suggested that it would be good for them to experience what our campus offers.

In a subsequent meeting with youth stakeholders, I asked them to rate their interest in participating in a writing space on a scale of one to five, and all six rated their interest at three. Three participants expressed interest in working on digital stories, two in spoken word poetry, and one on a comic book. They all wanted to work independently and tell stories about themselves. While they indicated they would be nervous about sharing their work publicly, three participants were interested in public presentations and competitions with their peers. Based on this meeting, it was clear that it would take time to gain their trust and want to write. One participant disclosed that they write outside of school, and none were willing to share what they like to read with the group. Instead, they discussed what the writing space would look like suggesting oversized beanbag chairs, books, computers, and bright colors on the walls.

When I visited the youth stakeholders a second time, there were nine participants, and I was pleased to see that five from the original group had returned. They confirmed the data that I had gathered from the first meeting. However, I discovered they were interested in reading magazines, comic books, mystery, and action books this time. They also explained that they like to communicate with their friends through social media sites. One of the students told me that since my last visit, he has been trying to write team spoken word poetry with his friend.

Influences of the Spiritan Mission & Identity on Community Engagement at Duquesne

The Spiritans, or the Congregation of the Holy Spirit as they are more formally known, are a collection of priests, brothers, and lay people spread across six continents and over sixty countries. In 1878, six Spiritan priests founded Pittsburgh Catholic College of the Holy Ghost (i.e., what would become Duquesne University) to offer educational opportunities to the children of immigrants employed in the city's steel mills. As stated in *Spiritan Rule of Life*, their primary mission is “service to those whose needs are the greatest and the oppressed” and is carried out through “‘integral integration’ of people, action for justice and peace, and participation in development” (Congregation of the Holy Spirit, 2014, p. 4). Their solidarity with the oppressed focused on enslaved and formerly enslaved people in Africa and the colonies (Henry, 1983, p. 138). Additionally, their efforts toward liberation and abolition involved a plan to “pay special attention to the education of young people and... the formation of a black clergy, of teachers, catechists, farmers and artisans skilled in a variety of trades” (Liebermann, 2011, p. 381). This element of the Spiritan charism results in an adaptive educational structure that

respects everyone's uniqueness and signifies an ability to respond "to the most pressing educational needs of the people of their times" while also recognizing individual vocations as sacred (Duaine, 2013, p. 103). Finally, openness to the Spirit is a sentiment that has driven their respect for indigenous cultures and has exemplified Spiritan work worldwide.

In his analysis of the Spiritan charism, Duaine (2013) points out that the founders of the order were seeking a special vocation for teaching within their candidates for the priesthood and notes a series of Spiritan marks of education (pp. 102-107). Chief among these is what is referred to as an openness to the (Holy) Spirit, which stands in sharp contrast to the obedience at the heart of so many other orders. Duaine (2013) further illustrates the core tenants of Spiritan pedagogy in the following:

All Spiritan educational ministry presumes that the Gospel is essentially social and seeks peace and justice for all. There is no peace without justice just as there is no justice that does not lead to peace. Our educational ministry is informed by the two sisters of social justice, solidarity and subsidiarity. These two principles inform the way we govern our institutions and all of our pedagogy. They shape the ethos of our lives and communities. Those whom we educate should be immersed in this ethos and be brought up in the art of discerning how to integrate subsidiarity and solidarity in society. This is our way of educating with a sense of seeking the good in common (common good). Integration of the two can only be accomplished by people who possess discerning spirits, individually and

communally; spirits that see, understand what they see, judge the value of what they understand and choose to act for the good of all (p. 109).

Another Spiritan mark of education is a global vision that promotes empowerment and liberation from injustice, poverty and ignorance. Duaine points out that in education, this means "combining concern for the disadvantaged with openness to the needs of people from all walks of life" (2013, p. 104). Additionally, community is deeply valued by the Spiritan founders and translates into a sense of dialogic mentorship with students where "both grow and become themselves" (Duaine, 2013, p. 104). Elsewhere in Catholic social thought, Cavanaugh (1999) notes that the concept of accompaniment expresses an ethos of walking together in solidarity and interdependence. Roberts (2012) further explains that accompaniment is a "walking with" that recognizes both the injustices suffered by and the inherent beauty of those living on the margins (p. 11).

Dostilio (2014) offers a history of Duquesne's efforts to engage with its neighboring communities from 1987 to 2014. In her work, she notes the frequency, quality, depth, sustainability and impact of Duquesne's achievements in community engagement were formally recognized with a Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Community Engagement Certification. According to the Carnegie Classification, community engagement is a mutually beneficial collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities to share knowledge and resources, and their classification is a way to recognize these efforts (Mann, 2021, p. 19). Dostilio goes on to acknowledge the importance of the Spiritan Charism in providing an essential foundation for these efforts, and the impressive network of community partners seeking to work with our faculty and students. (2014 p. 140). However, she also points

out three critical challenges limiting the university's efficacy in community engagement. First, she listed the inclination toward the charitable, in the form of the traditional service-learning model, where people with privilege "give back" to people on the margins to "feel good" about themselves. Obviously, this is incredibly problematic because it is not addressing the fundamental and systemic injustices that push people to the margins and inhibits authentic relationships between community partners and universities. Second, Dostilio notes that while service-learning courses were very effective in helping students to achieve discipline specific learning, they did nothing to generate any sense of civic responsibility. Finally, she recognized that the absence of any practical mechanism for recognizing community-engaged work within the faculty handbook was a barrier to faculty participation. Specifically, while there were a variety of standards and metrics for teaching and research that could be used in making cases for promotion and tenure, nothing formally justified community engagement as an indicator of merit or achievement (Dostilio, 2014, p. 141). As such, faculty in the tenure stream or seeking promotion were taking a risk in their community-engaged work because there was no guarantee that it would be counted toward their advancement.

Cochran and Weaver (2017) offer an example of how faculty have attempted to respond to the challenge of impacting the sense of civic responsibility among students. They used a pedagogy of deep listening and facilitated discussion where they took students into Pittsburgh's historic Hill District neighborhood for dialogues with residents, organizers and stakeholders. These conversations addressed community development from a trauma-informed perspective as part of a pedagogy for teaching ethics at a Catholic university. Specifically, the discussions focused on the personal narratives of

community members and leaders related to the history of their community and their personal experiences in attempts at community revitalization (p. 246). They found that these community-based conversations effectively generated a desire to make a positive social impact among students.

The Candidate's Leadership Perspectives on the Problem

Prior to my work experience at Duquesne's Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research (CETR), I spent 11 years developing and implementing wildlife conservation classes, theatrical productions, animal interaction programs, as well as guided tours of zoological facilities for K through 12 students, educators, and families from neighboring communities. This work also included presenting interactive animal programs at schools in historically marginalized neighborhoods. These outreach programs were designed to be integrated into the classroom curriculum and assist teachers who wanted to initiate local conservation activities with their students. Through this engagement with the community, it became apparent that collaborative initiatives between local organizations and their surrounding communities could spark student interest, offer teachers support, and bring diverse groups together for the public good. As a result, my zoological education experience has made me uniquely qualified to contribute to my problem of practice in the context of collaboratively building democratically engaged after-school programming with stakeholders.

My understanding of this problem as a social justice issue is also informed by my Master's degree studies in Social and Public Policy with a concentration in Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies. Through that program of study, I acquired invaluable soft skills. For example, in pursuing educational equity in after-school programming and

working as a community-engaged professional, I have frequently found myself drawing on my knowledge of social movements and community organizing to gain stakeholder participation and foster collaboration across differences. Additionally, as higher education institutions aim to transform community-university partnerships and democratize knowledge, it is essential to have individuals involved who can bridge the gap and engage multiple perspectives as well as acknowledge the historical tensions that persist between the academy and the community.

Over the past eight years, I have experienced a wealth of opportunities working at the Center for CETR. Specifically, I have had the chance to work alongside remarkable community and campus colleagues, including Dr. Jessica Mann and Dr. Lina Dostilio, both recognized leaders in the field of higher education community engagement. Early in my career, Dr. Dostilio provided me with opportunities and venues to introduce the idea of developing a community writing space to university, community, and school stakeholders. Under her supervision, I convened planning meetings with stakeholders, held dialogue circles with youth, prepared a grant funding request, and recruited volunteers. These opportunities increased my capacity to understand and begin to address this problem of practice at both program and system levels. The most important thing I have learned through my work at the Center for (CETR) is that authentic community engagement is relationship-based and happens alongside community members. Moreover, democratic collaboration offers the potential for social change not only in historically marginalized communities, but also higher education. I am fortunate that Dr. Mann has given me the opportunity to expand my understanding of democratic collaboration as we work to develop impactful partnerships with our local communities.

Direct Experience with Development of Out-of-School-Time Writing Partnerships at Center for CETR

What initially inspired me to advocate for marginalized students in after-school programming was a TED Prize talk that noted author Dave Eggers gave in 2008. I was drawn in by his enthusiasm as he spoke about the beginnings of the after-school writing program, 826 Valencia. At the end of the talk, Eggers presented his TED Wish to the audience. It was a call to action for individuals and organizations to develop creative ways to engage directly with their public schools and to share their experiences. In his closing remarks, I specifically remember him saying, “Some of these kids just don't plain know how good they are: how smart and how much they have to say. You can tell them. You can shine that light on them, one human interaction at a time” (Eggers, 2008, p. 8). Since then, I have been motivated to gain experiences that help me to better understand the needs and interests of the communities I work with.

Originally, I wanted to address this problem because I thought that 826 National provided an excellent model to adapt for this problem of practice. For instance, the people behind 826 National are committed to serving children who are marginalized. Their rubric for selecting a diverse neighborhood for a writing center is based on it being under-resourced, gang-neutral, close to public transportation for both volunteers and students, and that multiple public schools are located close by (826 National, 2013). Second, their model recognizes the importance of a diverse volunteer community of writers and those interested in fostering youth literacy through “active and engaged” individualized attention (826 National, 2013, p. 12). Third, in an effort to attract students who would not be interested in a community-based program, they work alongside

teachers to conduct in-school project-based programs that are “portable, malleable, and easily adapted to align with different curricula” (826 National, 2013, p. 12). Fourth, the writing centers operate uniquely as a “Third Space” or “a place different from home and school that fosters creative interaction” (826 National, 2013, p.13). Fifth, when programs exceed their capacity, satellite programs are started to accommodate student demand. Finally, 826 National encourages other nonprofits to adapt their model and develop their own programs.

In 2014, 826 National received the American Prize for Literacy by the Library of Congress, which recognizes organizations doing “exemplary, innovative, and easily replicable work over a sustained period of time” (826 National, 2014). Additionally, 826 National has received recognition from the Wallace Foundation for being an after-school program that is “successfully engaging low-income youth” (826 National, 2014). While the 826 National model is considered innovative and appears to be impactful for students, I recognized that there was room for improvement in the form of student civic engagement.

An Evolving Story

Often forgotten in these stories is the “lone survivor” of Black Lives Matter, Leon Ford Jr. He faced death at the hands of police like so many others, but lived—and his battle with the Pittsburgh criminal-justice system is a reminder that sometimes the hardest battles come after the shooting stops.

—Jason Johnson, *The Root*, 2017

At the age of nineteen, during a routine traffic stop, Leon Ford was shot five times by a Pittsburgh police officer. Despite immediately receiving proper identification and paperwork, the officers were convinced that Leon was a person of interest named Lamont

Ford. The legal community refers to this as a case of mistaken identity, but Leon will tell you that the contact officer and cover officer deliberately tried to make him who they wanted him to be. Whether they were poorly trained, clouded by racist assumptions, or overcome by the classic psychological pitfalls of groupthink, Leon still carries bullets from an officer's service weapon in his body and is paralyzed from the waist down. While it is likely that he will never regain the use of his legs, he has undoubtedly learned to fly and reminds me regularly that his spirit has been mobilized to bring about significant change. Unfortunately, stories of the unjust killing of young black males by police are all too familiar and rarely have significant consequences for police officers. Leon's initial survival, continued resilience, and perpetual grace has resulted in an extraordinary narrative he uses to challenge institutionalized racism not only in Pittsburgh but worldwide.

When we talk about issues involving systemic racism and excessive use of force by the police, names like George Floyd, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, Tamir Rice, and Walter Scott are often the first to come to mind. While these names have sparked broad public outrage, the voices of the men they belong to are lost. Alternatively, Leon is a living reminder of the systemic racism rampant in our criminal justice system and our complicity in its perpetuation. For over a decade, Leon has been employing the gravity of his injuries in conjunction with the vitality of his spirit to emerge as a voice for the voiceless and an agent of social change seeking accountability at all levels of our political and criminal justice system.

The media often referred to Leon as the "lone survivor" of Black Lives Matter, and while that is a meaningful way to identify him, those who know him well recognize

that he is a social movement in and of himself. Within such horrific circumstances, it is remarkable for one young man to willingly assume the mantle of the voice of the voiceless, but Leon does it well with purpose, integrity and a seemingly tireless commitment. He is often defiant in the face of structural racism with his refusal to suffer in vain. As a result of the disastrous regularity of police brutality against young black men, there is a palpable sense of urgency surrounding Leon. He capitalizes on that energy by persistently urging audiences and well-wishers to move beyond rhetoric, protests, or social media and instead choose to opt-in to the political and educational systems to take actionable steps toward lasting structural change. In most instances, Leon calmly relays his traumatic experience and evolving journey toward wholeness with a warm and inviting smile. Before being shot by a police officer, Leon was a boxer. So, the same toughness and endurance that were a hallmark of his time in the ring came to bare in his ongoing struggle against systemic oppression and are quite extraordinary to witness.

Without a doubt, his family is his stronghold; with them, he finds an endless supply of love and support. Still, Leon and his family have been left to bear the burdens, stress, and risks of publicly challenging the authorities. Now understanding that this was to his detriment, Leon describes his efforts at perpetually trying to strategize and live a life of perfection in the public eye as mentally and physically exhausting. Nevertheless, after ten years, he continues to pursue police accountability and justice for himself by building bridges between police officers and the communities they serve. His story is one that is thoroughly entwined in the historical pursuit of equality for all Americans and should never be forgotten.

Leon often describes his healing as a journey rooted in the principles of love, compassion, and understanding; however, as any human being would, he struggles with layers of trauma. If you listen closely, you can hear it. If you can look past his brilliant smile, you can see it. Leon is facing a daily battle against unimaginable physical pain and mental exhaustion. Watching the heavy toll this took on him worried me. However, as Leon started to share his struggles with depression, anger and forgiveness, I noticed that he had brought significant healing to himself and those around him through his vulnerability which has become his superpower. At times, Leon will drop out of sight because he is not superhuman and needs time to live life on his terms, he has more than earned that time.

From Community Partner to Chosen Family

In March of 2015, my second semester as a doctoral student, I had the good fortune of being introduced to Leon by Dr. Darius Prier in his Education and Social Justice class. Leon was invited to share his story with my cohort as part of a discussion on the misrepresentation of Black males in the media and the existing inequalities in public education. Within the accompanying critical dialogue, I experienced a paradigm shift in learning that set the stage for our future collaboration. Most of my experiences as a student have involved passive reception of transmitted knowledge; however, this classroom experience constituted a moral shock (Jasper, 1997) that fundamentally affected my sense of self and is aligned with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978). My responses to the assigned critical reflection questions help to illustrate the effect:

In what way did Leon Ford's narrative help you think about social justice issues toward urban youth?

Leon made a comment during his talk that I wrote down, "they made me who they wanted me to be" and it has been stuck in my head. For me, that is the issue and it is where the injustices that he has experienced originate. It seems virtually impossible to escape stereotypes if a young man as remarkable as Leon can't be seen for who he really is. How completely helpless and frightened he must have felt in that terrifying moment. Who would want to get out of that car? The police officers core beliefs and biases contribute to the common narrative that builds and gets redistributed over time. I think that many teenagers feel unnoticed or ignored at one time or another, but to be labeled, almost stalked and terrorized in your own community must feel like a constant battle for young men like Leon. It is absolutely not normal to be pulled over multiple times in a week for doing nothing at all. It is not normal to have to worry about being safe from the police.

How did his story challenge dominant stereotypical narratives often reflected about Black males in media?

Leon is a young man that any parent would be proud to call their son. As he unfolded his life in front of us, I was touched by the absolute love he has for his family and their unwavering support for him. He just wants to make his dad proud like any young man does. He has progressed through his justifiable feelings of resentment and has channeled them into something so much bigger than himself. He clearly understands that he is alive to tell the story of those who have not survived the same circumstances. You can see the conviction in his

face. He understands that he can be the voice not only for his community, but a voice of his generation. Leon challenges every aspect of the dominant stereotypical narrative found in the media not only by how he lived his life before the brutality he faced, but even more so afterward.

In what way do you feel Leon's talk is useful to educational leaders, particularly in urban communities?

As educational leaders, we need to raise up the voices of urban youth to challenge social constructs and institutionalized racism. We are responsible for making sure that in our spheres of influence the deficit views of urban youth are broken down by the truth. They need opportunities to share their personal narratives in visible and thought-provoking ways. Leon has the right idea. His story confronts difficult realities so profoundly; you are changed after you hear it.

At that time, I was working as the Faculty Development Program Manager in the Center for CETR and was developing an understanding of the possibilities as well as the limitations of community engagement in higher education. For some time, my husband, Dr. Norman Conti, a sociologist at Duquesne, had been working with the Center for CETR, and through the intersection of our work, we crossed paths with Leon several times over the next year. Then, in March of 2016, Leon requested a lunch meeting with Norm and asked if I would join them, but instead, Norm suggested that Leon bring his family to our home for dinner. Leon graciously accepted the invitation, and I was excited because forging new friendships over a home-cooked meal and sharing stories around our family table had become a familiar and cherished practice. I did not anticipate developing a partnership with Leon that day, but when meaningful stories replaced small talk, our

potential to work together became an exciting prospect. As our children played together in the backyard, we continued talking about his recovery, family, and plans for the future.

I told Leon about an initiative that involved a small group of community stakeholders, faculty, and students working to develop a writing space for under-served youth from neighborhoods adjacent to campus called the Second Story. Unfortunately, the project fell through because we could not secure a location on campus. Even though my elevator speech was well rehearsed, it was hard to hide my disappointment. Nevertheless, this project was the original focus of my dissertation and a labor of love, so I was still determined to bring some form of youth writing program to campus. I believed this type of project had great potential to positively impact local youth and become an exemplar of democratically engaged campus-community partnerships.

Later, Leon received a phone call just as I finished talking and seemed discouraged. After he hung up the phone, Leon mentioned that the call was from a librarian who wanted to negotiate with him over a fee the public library charged for serving food in their meeting rooms. On Thursday evenings, Leon mentored a group of young Black men at one of the local libraries and would bring a few pizzas to enjoy during their meetings. Unfortunately, the room maintenance fee coupled with the cost of food was making the meetings too costly for him. Then, Leon casually mentioned that he had been writing a book, describing the writing process as therapeutic, and mentioned that writing might also prove beneficial for his mentees, who up until then had been meeting as a men's group and book club.

He spoke about his mentees with such reverence and warmth, noting not only their recent academic achievements but also their personal transformations. Without him

actually saying it, I could tell even in that moment that the young men were also playing an important role in his own healing process. That evening, as my husband and I cleared the kitchen, I casually asked him if he thought Leon would consider bringing his mentees to campus for their meetings. Norm suggested that the only way to know for sure was to ask. Originally, I had been stuck on the 826 National model and the idea that in order to be impactful and inviting a campus community writing space needed to be an elaborate grant funded operation with a uniquely designed space and a mass of campus and community partners. Leon helped me realize that the structural components already existed, and the people involved are what truly matters.

The Voices Project

With deep conviction, Leon has described himself as a survivor of police brutality, writer, activist, entrepreneur and change-maker. He has been incredibly inspirational to a group of young men he mentored through the Voices Project, a program he founded in early 2015. His idea for the Voices Project emerged from several experiences. First was a kitchen conversation between Leon's grandmother and one of Leon's friends, who she was afraid might be a bad influence on him. Despite her initial reservations, Leon's grandmother welcomed the friend into her home and was able to drop her protective stance toward the young man. Then, unexpectedly, the two began to connect as they traded stories, and Leon witnessed his steadfast grandmother open up and listen to his friend without judgment.

Recognizing that meaningful conversation was the key to shifting negative perceptions, Leon tried his hand at mediating deeply personal disputes and, in some cases, violent conflicts between his friends. Obviously, his fateful encounter with the

police and ongoing efforts to forgive them to free himself lent weight to those tense conversations. Nevertheless, in the process of dealing with his pain, Leon tapped into a remarkable ability to help others navigate towards healing by exposing his vulnerabilities and engaging in meaningful dialogues.

After these experiences, Leon started to record interviews he conducted with his friends, and he posted several of them on YouTube. Leon was surprised that his friends would share such intimate details about the traumas they experienced growing up in economically depressed neighborhoods. In those videos, his friends tell their stories with such openness and vulnerability that you are compelled to listen. Several mothers, grandmothers, and guardians in the community started noticing the positive impact that Leon was having on the young men and asked him to mentor their children formally. Leon's commitment to his family and community is unparalleled, and he agreed to become their mentor.

Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne

On July 28th, 2016, Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne brought a group of young men that Leon mentors together with faculty and students, as well as a series of local artists, writers, educational leaders, government officials, entrepreneurs, police officers, activists, and community members. Our goal in these bi-monthly sessions was to facilitate connections and engage in challenging conversations related to race, education, policing, and community trauma. Often, we explored these issues through creative writing prompts, readings, music, or spoken word. Making space on campus for deliberative dialogues across social divisions (i.e., race, age, gender, etc.) established a dynamic setting for democratic listening and transformational learning experiences.

More specifically, I witnessed participants' willingness to cross social boundaries, risk exposing unconscious biases, and share their personal stories.

As a result, I believe that Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne cultivated transparent, cooperative friendships that help promote healing and generate positive change by leveraging both community and university assets. It was a pilot model of community-campus engagement where authentic relationships became the foundation for establishing common ground between individuals from divergent social backgrounds. This type of initiative has great potential to foster a level of trust between campus and community that builds a foundation for enduring democratically engaged collaborations.

During the program, I kept an archive of email correspondence and text messages with Leon Ford. Additionally, I have a record of meeting dates and events, brief personal reflections, post-session notes, and group writing prompts. These artifacts have proven to be somewhat useful in supplementing the data collected in the interview process as well as the autoethnographic portion of the study. More importantly, they demonstrate the evolution of our partnership over a sustained period.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions Dissertation Addresses

This dissertation is focused on identifying essential characteristics of an initiative that builds cooperative relationships and solidarity in order to advance a democratically engaged campus-community partnership. Part of this work involves attempting to understand the conditions that undermine these relationships as well as the critical practices that strengthen them and the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them. Fundamentally, this research aims to garner ideas from and identify

specific features of the Leon Ford Voices Project@Duquesne to inform the design of future campus-community initiatives.

To that end, my central research question and subordinate inquiry are:

Primary Question: What aspects of the program did the participants find most personally and professionally impactful?

Secondary Question: How did a sense of community within the experience contribute to participants learning?

Tertiary Question: What barriers to participation and engagement did participants experience?

Chapter 2: Review of Knowledge for Action

From Civil Associations to Dewey and Democratic Listening

In one way everyone is shut off from everyone else. We have, for instance, no access to each other's consciousness, should we choose to be silent; and yet through the medium of my voice you somehow or another are enabled to participate in my consciousness; and my consciousness is enabled to expand and enlarge until it gets into the community with yours; so that my consciousness—while it is individual—is also social, because it has taken to itself an indefinite number of thoughts and suggestions coming from everyone in all ages.

—John Dewey, *The Social Value of Courses*, 1901

Tocqueville and Dewey's Associated Living in a Democracy

During the mid-19th century, French political philosopher and historian Alexis de Tocqueville published his enduring examination of early American society and politics *Democracy in America*. In the second volume, he makes the following observation about voluntary associations in America:

As soon as some inhabitants of the United States have conceived of a sentiment or an idea that they want to bring about in the world, they seek each other out, and when they have found each other, they unite. From that moment, they are no longer isolated men, but a power that speaks to which you listen" (1835/2012, p. 901).

As a member of the French aristocracy, Tocqueville found it noteworthy that citizens of a democracy are compelled to find strength in numbers, mobilize to overcome individual vulnerabilities and as a result, protect their freedom. In 1985, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton mirrored Tocqueville's concerns about our ability to remain interconnected while holding a dissonant belief in "the inherent dignity and, indeed, sacredness of the human person" (i.e., individualism) in a democracy (pp. vii, 334).

Tocqueville draws our attention to the vital importance of voluntary associations in a democracy when he notes that, “In democratic countries, the science of association is the mother science; the progress of all others depends on the progress of the former” (1835/2012, p. 902). Correspondingly, Bellah et al. (1985) argue that “one of the keys to survival of free institutions is the relationship between private and public life, the way in which citizens do, or do not, participate in the public sphere” (p. vii). According to Bellah et al. (1985), “Associational life, in Tocqueville’s thinking, is the best bulwark against the condition he feared most: the mass society of mutually antagonistic individuals, easy prey to despotism” (p. 38). Unfortunately, they also maintain that “individualism” rather than equality has “marched inexorably through our history” and has ultimately undermined our freedom (pp. vii, 334). For Tocqueville, intellectually and morally based civil associations are the keys to maintaining a functional democracy.

Even though Tocqueville lauded many aspects of American democracy, he also recognized some of its deepest imperfections. Most notably, Tillery (2009) draws a number of parallels between Tocqueville’s understanding of “race and race relations” in *Democracy in America* and the “core assumptions” of critical race theory (p. 639). In his comparative analysis, he argues that “Tocqueville shares with critical race theorists the view that white privilege was endemic in American culture and shapes both jurisprudence and outcomes in democratic politics” (2009, p. 639). Tillery then goes on to suggest that “Tocqueville presages the criticalists’ arguments about the negative externalities of white privilege and interest convergence” (2009, p. 639).

According to Bellah et al. (1985), “One of the major costs of the of the rise of the research university and its accompanying professionalism and specialization was the

impoverishment of the public sphere” (p. 299). As recently as 2013, McGowan, Bonefas, and Siracusa draw upon Tocqueville to discuss the development of a “democratic ethos” among students. Alternately, Pope and Surak (2020) argue that instead of focusing “on citizenship development at the (perceived) expense of intellectual or professional development,” we should “show how the development and application of a student’s civic understandings complements and adds to intellectual and professional development” (Promoting Civic Engagement in Higher Education section).

John Dewey the American philosopher, educational reformer, and political activist, read Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* when he was an undergraduate at the University of Vermont (Feuer,1958). Undoubtedly, Tocqueville informed Dewey’s understanding of associated activity within a democracy; however, his ideas grew more nuanced as Dewey promoted the formation of dialogic communities for establishing common ground. To this end, he proposed the following definition of democracy:

A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity (Dewey, 1922, p. 93).

From this definition, it is apparent that Dewey’s concept of democracy is at its root participatory and involves open conversations across differences that reveal a common purpose.

According to Innes, Gilchrist, Friedman, and Tompkins (2016), Dewey “believed that the most important role of a democracy as a form of association is to increase communication and that diversity is the key to dialogue” (p. 34). Conversely, they note that in a multicultural society with diverse views and cultural backgrounds it can often be challenging for groups to reach a consensus. They also report that in order to counteract his critics, Dewey promoted the improvement of education because of its potential to increase the capacity of communities for dialogue, consensus, and efficacy. While it may seem apparent, Innes, et al. (2016), remind us that to remain true to Dewey’s notion of participatory democracy, dialogues must be free from coercion. Furthermore, they distinguish dialogic discourse and communicative action as “open, reciprocal, and transactional communication” (p. 37).

Given his commitment to education and social reform, it is no surprise that Dewey has had a significant and lasting influence on the field of community engagement in higher education. Innes, et al. (2016), in particular, direct our attention to Dewey’s ability to unite “academic and public life into active dialogue for cooperative problem solving” and they offer a modern take on Dewey’s philosophies with the aim of maintaining his relevance within the field (p. 29). Additionally, they highlight the fact that Dewey’s ideas are the foundation for many successful models of community-university partnerships such as problem-based learning, action research, service-learning, and participatory research. Clearly, over an extensive period of time, the literature has pointed to the importance of civic associations and their role in democratic dialogues and establishing a new social order.

In an analysis of his contributions to service-learning, Saltmarsh recognizes that, “Dewey’s writings inform service-learning through a philosophy of education, a theory of inquiry, a conception of community and democratic life, and a means for individual engagement in society toward the end of social transformation” (1996, p.13). More recently, Saltmarsh (2012) builds on Dewey’s work to make the point that higher education necessitates engagement with the community. Moreover, it requires fully collaborative relationships with communities where one set of knowledge or expertise is not valued above another. To become fully collaborative, however, those in higher education must engage authentically with the community members and work to build trusting relationships. In an effort to identify critical principles of authenticity for community engagement professionals (CEP’s), Hernandez and Pasquesi (2017), referred to Garrison’s (1996) theory of “democratic listening” as a vital component of “being” with others as CEP’s are working to building authentic relationships and making new connections with individuals and their communities.

The Theory of Listening in Democratic Dialogues Toward Cooperative Friendships

Building authentic relationships across communities requires that we engage in genuine conversations and risk active listening. Garrison (1996) reminds us of this as he combines Dewey’s work with that of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1996) in his Deweyan theory of listening in democratic dialogues. Garrison’s theory suggests, “that we acknowledge a prominent role for risking and restructuring our social habits in open dialogues across, gender, racial, and ethnic differences” (1996, p. 429). Garrison explains that Dewey considered education to be a path to freedom when it

includes discourse between diverse participants and results in meaning making as well as growth.

For Dewey (1922), education was a social process that can eliminate the internal and external obstacles to discourse (p. 105). By this measure, members of a diverse group could share their lived experiences both equally and openly. In consonance with Dewey, Garrison (1996) emphasizes that, “Pluralistic conversations are political acts that create the conditions of free and liberal thought and action, but the first stirrings of democratic freedom lie deep within” (1996, p. 48). In his view, education safeguards citizens from manipulation and allows for growth or cultivation beyond flawed ideologies. Garrison (1996) describes the alternative as an isolated society where our freedom is at risk because we have placed our welfare in the hands of a few powerful individuals that are motivated to serve their own interests.

Garrison (1996) goes on to criticize Dewey and his counterparts for disregarding the importance of democratic listening and instead focusing their attention on freedom of speech and being heard. In his study of political listening, Dobson (2012) informs us that the prioritizing of free speech and focus on being heard dates as far back as Aristotle. Additionally, he acknowledges that talking is a means to an end in that we are trying to make a point, support an argument, or convince a listener. On the other hand, he notes that, “listening *pries open* the content of speech and opens up new avenues for exploration” (Dobson, 2012, p. 849).

Garrison (1996) asserts that where conflict exists, the oppressed are the most likely to go unheard as they are forced into listening to those in power (p. 429). Interestingly, Dobson (2012) notes that listening is essential in truth and reconciliation

committees where the goals are relationship building, sharing disparate understandings, developing reciprocity, and even empathy. According to Garrison (1996), Western liberal thinking tends to elevate freedom of speech and devalue listening by mistakenly characterizing it as passive or submissive. As a result, we perpetuate the falsehood that “truth and goodness will prevail so long as everyone can speak their mind” (Garrison, 1996, p. 438). Alternately, Dobson (2012) believes that listening is an “act of agency” because we decide what we are going to listen to (p. 853).

In contrast, Waks (2011) argues that scholars have long overlooked Dewey’s explanation of listening and more importantly, his contribution to the literature regarding the connection between listening and democracy. Specifically, he draws our attention to the difference between one-way listening, or straight-line listening, and transactional listening-in-conversation, noting the link between transactional listening-in-conversation and Dewey’s concept of cooperative friendship. Waks himself writes:

The back-and-forth of conversation is not in general just about getting the listener to accept the current ends-in-view as his or her own in order to achieve a shared goal, but rather (or also) to effect a larger unity of purpose across many ends through a reorientation of attitude in the direction of friendship (2011, p. 196).

While one-way listening is associated with a traditional classroom setting where students receive information passively from teachers, transactional listening-in-conversation emphasizes collaboration and generating new understanding among participants that propels them to action.

Next, Waks (2011) goes on to describe how for Dewey, the art of conversation is closely related to the development of “cooperative friendships” that extend from

individuals to broader groups, sparking a “communal feeling” and ultimately “democratic solidarity” among citizens (pp. 197-198). Interestingly, as common ground is established between cooperative friends their changing interests, behaviors, and points of view often complicate their interactions with members of their usual social groups (Waks, 2011, p. 200). While Dewey (1922) recognizes the desire for a group to preserve customs and traditions, he emphatically opposes isolation (pp. 91-92). Instead, Dewey’s idea of a democratic society promotes the “recognition of mutual interests as a element of social control” as well as a “freer interaction between social groups (once isolated so far as intention could keep up a separation)” (1922, p. 92).

Accordingly, transactional listening-in-conversation and cooperative friendship inform Dewey’s theory of democratic society (Waks, 2011, p. 198). Here, many critics take issue with what appears to be an unattainable ideal and even Waks admits, “The idea of *friendship* as the glue holding civic life together sounds strange to modern ears” (2011, p. 200). In an attempt to further clarify, Haroutunian and Gorden (2011) suggest that:

[T]he relation between the listener and the speaker, as Waks interprets Dewey, is of people sharing interchangeable roles. Working together the speaker and listener try to move toward what is common to both—common in terms of shared goals and understanding as they seek to become cooperative friends and fellow citizens in a democracy (2011, p. 124).

It is important to note that Dewey (1942) concedes the challenges of building and maintaining cooperative friendships when he acknowledges, “The ever-increasing interdependence of peoples in every phase of modern life does not automatically bring understanding, amity and cooperation of the interdependent elements” (p. 445).

Without a doubt, cooperative friendships require effort, discomfort, and a commitment to the common good, with the alternative being our current circumstance of palpable animosity leading to a deterioration of civic life. Kearney and Fitzpatrick's (2021) radical hospitality can serve as a pathway toward, and an ideal result of, cooperative friendship. They posit radical hospitality as a way to move beyond so much of the cynical exchange within our strategic social relationships. Kearney and Fitzpatrick explain that:

For hospitality to be hospitality, we need a special kind of “symmetrical asymmetry” where each person gives more than she receives and receives more than she gives—without why...Hospitality does not occur in a market place where things are bought and sold in contractual negotiations of supply and demand... Real hospitality occurs beyond the walls of economic calculation (2021, pg. 11).

Just as the discussion of the interplay between listening and speaking is recognized as essential for democracy to truly function as was imagined, understanding the dialectics of authentic hospitality versus calculated exchange is required for building relationships that restore and augment our communities.

Furthermore, Dewey recognizes the barriers to open communication when he notes, “Prejudices of economic status, of race, of religion, imperil democracy because they set up barriers to communication, or deflect or distort its operation” (1942, pp. 443-444). Reflecting on those barriers in his analysis of American pragmatism, philosopher Cornell West (1989) takes issue with Dewey being a gradual reformer rather than a disruptor of the social order, primarily due to his discursive approach. West goes on to

argue that Dewey's "preoccupation with communication proceeds out of a deep commitment to rational dialogue in an irrational culture" (p.106). However, West also notes that Dewey's conception of dialogue "serves as *the* vehicle to create and constitute communities for the amelioration of existing circumstances" and to achieve the ideal community it "is a matter of cultural politics, in which communication resting upon shared values and promoting diversity must play a combative role" (1989p. 106).

To overcome the obstacles to authentic communication, Garrison (1996) uses Gadamer's hermeneutics to inform his theory of active listening. He explains that active listening requires that we first acknowledge our "historically and culturally conditioned prejudices" that constitute our identity (Garrison, 1996, p. 434). When we risk admitting our prejudices, we begin to disrupt how we interpret others lived experiences. Specifically, Garrison reminds us that "while unconsciously under the influence of a prejudice, it is impossible for us fully to recognize them, and if we cannot identify the prejudices that constitute our personal identities, then in some sense we cannot even know ourselves, much less understand somebody different" (1996, p. 434). Of course, he does not expect us to shed all of our prejudices or become completely objective listeners. However, in the discomfort of transparency, Garrison (1996) believes that we are more likely to question our prejudices and, most importantly, experience personal growth.

Despite the risks inherent in exposing our prejudices to others, Garrison (1996) offers several reasons for engaging in hermeneutic listening. They include the following:

- First, we sometimes just get hit in the head. Second, we know ourselves only if we know others. Third, we may desire to edit and emendate the story of our lives. Fourth, we desire to grow. There is one more reason mentioned earlier but not

discussed: We are always already at risk in a complex and everchanging world.

Vulnerability is often the best response to such danger (p. 450).

Admittedly, some of Garrison's rationales for engaging in hermeneutic listening might seem overly simplistic, but he is right to draw our attention to the fact that we are constantly at risk of exposing our biases. Over the long-term, we are better off making the conscious decision to open up to disruption in our lives.

Subsequently, Garrison (1996) discusses the role of tension in hermeneutics. In the following, he uses Gadamer (1960) to explain that tension:

Hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness...in regard to what has been said: the language in which the text addresses us, the story it tells us. Here to there is tension...*The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between* (p. 295).

Gadamer believed hermeneutic tension could be brought about by cultural distance; however, he maintains that "the dialectic of difference and sameness, is the crucial idea, not distance" and by entering into conversations across race, gender, and ethnicity, "our habitual ways of feeling, thinking, and acting are disrupted" (Garrison, 1996, pp. 435, 436).

Next, Garrison (1996) describes the three experiences of the other in Gadamer's (1960) hermeneutics that includes the Thou, I-Thou, and the "the openness to tradition characteristic of historically effected consciousness" which is considered to be "the highest form of hermeneutical experience" (p. 361). According to Garrison (1996), the Thou relationship is predicated on the predictability of human nature, the I-Thou

relationship involves sympathetic understanding, and the third relies on the “creative production of understanding and not mere reproduction of meaning” (p. 450).

It is important to note that although sympathetic listening may seem innocent, in dialogues across difference it can be perceived as hubris or disguised as empathy. Garrison (1996) argues “Sympathy may inspire a self-righteous and self-assured attitude in do-gooders when they assume they know all they need to know about themselves and others” (p. 437). He warns against three potential downfalls of sympathetic listening in dialogues across difference: first, there is a tendency to assume that our differences are barriers that we need to overcome; second, we make the mistake of believing that we are able to set aside our prejudices and inherently understand others on their own terms; finally, by listening sympathetically, we often limit ourselves by reproducing what someone has told us rather than creating a new understanding.

As discussed earlier, sympathetic listening can be a barrier in dialogues across difference; however, in his discussion of Dewey’s transactional listening-in-conversation Waks (2011) explains that a “sympathetic imagination” between conversational partners is essential to finding common ground (p. 197). Furthermore, Haroutunian-Gordon and Lavery (2011) note that for Waks, sympathetic imagination entails active listening in that, “it involves understanding something of the other’s experience and is marked by affection and trust” (p. 123). By achieving this “imaginative mutual awareness”, participants are fundamentally changed and discover new ways of working together (Waks, 2011, p. 197).

Finally, Garrison (1996) begins to build his naturalistic theory of democratic listening utilizing Dewey’s idea of habit to normalize Gadamer’s view of prejudice.

Specifically, he observes, “Listening to others different from ourselves may provide disruptive occasions for rising unconscious beliefs and prejudices; that is, habits, to conscious awareness and thereby creating the opportunity for critical self-reflection and growth” (Garrison, 1996, p. 445). While the risks and benefits of democratic listening are more readily apparent for the privileged listener, the inherent risks and harms as well as the discernable benefits to those who are marginalized are not adequately discussed. Additionally, a detailed examination of the potential broader societal impacts beyond existing anecdotal evidence as well as the practical application of this theory into educational practice is essential.

Critical Pedagogies Informing Listening Across Difference

Taylor (2015) provides a framework for socially just listening in the classroom setting utilizing Boler’s (1999) pedagogy of discomfort. Within this model, Taylor relies on Garrison’s (1996) Deweyan aim of hermeneutic tension as a mechanism for disrupting embedded prejudices as well as the accompanying habitual thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. More specifically, Boler and Zembylas (2003) point out that for Dewey, critical thought is essential to reconceiving our habits, and our “habits refine our emotions” (2003, pp.127, 128). They go on to assert that individuals need to deliberately work through instances of discomfort to change our habits and emotionally evolve. According to Taylor, the pedagogy of discomfort is a much-needed “critical response” to normalized classroom dialogue and listening practices (2015, p. 115). For Taylor, deliberative dialogues that take place in classrooms around issues of “racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism frequently reproduce, rather than disrupt students’ taken-for-granted ways of seeing the world and understanding the injustices that

permeate our educational institutions and practices” (2015, pp. 113, 115). Since Taylor’s examples appear to be drawn from middle school experiences, we can assume that this practice is applicable at that grade level and can be adapted for older students.

Moreover, Taylor’s framework (2015) emerges from three central claims found in the pedagogy of discomfort. First, she notes that dominant values and norms are constantly being reproduced through our habits and routines, which are often perpetuated and rarely scrutinized. By the same token, Boler and Zembylas (2003) argue that the dominant hegemonic position of the United States feeds into our acceptance of liberal individualism and reinforces the formation of overly simplistic views of difference that are embedded into our individual beliefs. Taylor (2015) notes that scholars of educational theory and social justice education have examined “how those in positions of social dominance and privilege often deny, dismiss, or rationalize away testimonies of social oppression in order to affirm their deeply held beliefs and worldviews” (p. 125).

For instance, Boler and Zembylas (2003) offer three “reductive conceptions of difference” familiar to critical educators for social justice, which includes three models. The first, the celebration/tolerance model, suggests that those who profess to celebrate differences equally often tolerate difference only when they “reflect the norms of the dominant culture” (p. 109). The second, the denial/sameness model examines the role of liberal individualism in thoughtlessly perpetuating assimilation by attempting to “deny or erase difference” (p. 110). And the final model, the natural response/biological model reveals the tendency for liberal individualists to explain away fear of difference as a natural human response. (p. 112).

Subsequently, Boler and Zembylas note that these overly simplistic models produce an accompanying emotional response to difference that allows the privileged to “abdicate responsibility for how differences are produced and perpetuated by individual beliefs and through psycho-social relations” and avoid the “difficult emotional terrain of difference as social and political” (2003, p. 114). Taylor (2015) confirms this conclusion and notes that in classroom listening, it is important to draw attention to the values as well as norms held by students because they frequently act as “interpretive filters” that influence what students are hearing and ultimately what they understand to be true about those who are different from them (p.121).

Second, Taylor (2015) emphasizes the important role that emotions play in the pedagogy of discomfort and social justice education (p.118). Subsequently, she draws our attention to the interconnectedness of the cognitive and emotional components of learning across difference as well as the equal roles they play in the educational process (p. 118). Taylor (2015) suggests that in instances where students are participating in dialogues across difference, emotions should be regarded as “natural elements of the learning process and as culturally and politically invested tools—and impediments—to learning about and across difference” (p. 118).

Furthermore, Boler and Zembylas (2003) explain that to engage more meaningfully in critical inquiry around issues of difference, necessitates the willingness of both educators and their students to venture beyond their “comfort zones” (p.111). They note that as students engage in critical inquiry it can be emotionally disquieting for them to realize that “the choices they believe they have made are not in fact a result of free will but rather determined by powerful ideological forces” (p.114). Specifically,

Boler and Zembylas (2003) direct our attention to liberal individualism as a factor in students' perceptions of free will because its "emphasis on agency and equal opportunity effectively hides oppression even from those who likely experience it" (p. 117). To put an even finer point on it, Boler and Zembylas direct our attention to McLaren's (1998) definition of hegemony:

[T]he maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force but primarily through the consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system, and the family (1998, p. 182).

In this sense, engaging in critical inquiry around issues of difference is a crucial counter-hegemonic practice that allows students not only to consider and question the dominant ideological forces at play, but also begin to challenge the status quo. Next, Boler and Zembylas (2003) alert us to the fact that "we are all victims of hegemony" (p. 114). With this comment, they are encouraging us to understand that the pedagogy of discomfort and its accompanying emotional workload is not reserved solely for the privileged. They inform us that each student will have their own "idiosyncratic experiences of discomfort" to untangle and process through (2003, p. 115). Rightfully, critics may argue that the emotional burden is never shared equally and that the potential destabilizing effects for marginalized students are far more significant and detrimental.

Third, Taylor (2015) explains that the purpose of the pedagogy of discomfort is for students and educators to intentionally resist the need for closure and to become more willing to grapple with the feelings of uncertainty that coincide with engaging across difference. Once again, critics may argue that the pedagogy of discomfort as an approach

to socially responsive listening requires a great deal of vulnerability and has the potential to create an unsafe classroom environment for students. Garrison (1996) would contend that listening well requires openness and in being open, we automatically assume some risk; however, along with that risk comes the potential benefits of personal growth and mutual understanding (p. 433). For Boler and Zembylas (2003), the rewards of engaging in critical thinking seem to outweigh all of the risks in that, the pedagogy of discomfort provides “students new windows on the world: to develop the capacity for critical inquiry regarding the production and construction of differences “which provides them with “a tool that will be useful over their lifetime” (p. 111).

Moreover, Taylor (2015) celebrates the fact that the pedagogy of discomfort reimagines “classrooms not as safe-zones for academic learning, but as sites of social justice education wherein difficult knowledge—of ableism, racism, sexism, homophobia, and heterosexism—is confronted, discussed, and challenged” (p. 120). Additionally, Taylor argues that classrooms are never really safe, “but are rather spaces wherein social power is produced and reproduced” (pp. 120-121). To this point, Garrison (1996) reminds us that the passive listener is “open to the dangers of being theorized or colonized while being “assimilated” by some dominant cultural norm or standard, or being defined by someone else’s terms” (p. 433).

From these three claims, Taylor (2015) begins to build a framework for socially just listening noting the duality of listening as a political and ethical act that can generate or oppose social injustice (p.119). What sets Taylor’s framework apart from other scholarship on listening is that she does not attempt to identify the characteristics of skilled listening. Instead, she describes how the pedagogy of discomfort exposes the

structural barriers that interrupt our listening across difference and goes on to suggest that even the most “virtuous listener” can lack the critical awareness needed to achieve socially just listening (p. 119). Specifically, Taylor emphasizes the conditions under which socially just listening can take place, notably “in the presence of a recognition of the role of social power, of ingrained distrust, and frequently, of historical lack of understanding or engagement” (p. 120). For Taylor, a student’s recognition of their positionality and ability to be emotionally engaged is vital to disrupting passive listening in the classroom.

Just as Garrison (1996) discusses the ways that sympathetic listening can be problematic, Taylor (2015), argues that in dialogues across difference, passive empathy or “putting oneself in the other’s shoes” falls short of socially just listening. In Taylor’s view, it allows us to mistakenly believe that we can “step outside of ourselves or create a radical receptivity of the other” that more importantly does not compel us as listeners to call into question the inequalities within existing social structures and our own complicity (pp. 122-124). In contrast to empathetic listening, Taylor maintains that listening that is informed by the pedagogy of discomfort is disruptive to normative learning because it calls for students to be both cognitively engaged and emotionally receptive to others lived experiences. It is only then that students can begin to critically examine their positionality in relation to others, explore why they are destabilized by encounters with difference, recognize social injustices, and ultimately be compelled to take action for social change by challenging dominant values and beliefs as well as counteracting dominant discourse. Likewise, Garrison (1996) insists that dialogues across difference

and “careful listening” are vital functions of education toward upholding a “progressive and pluralistic democracy” (Garrison, 1996, p. 449).

According to Taylor (2015), “Entertaining the real possibility that the world could appear otherwise than how it appears to us and that we might have a role in obscuring or marginalizing that alternative perspective is where we want to get” (p. 130). What she suggests might seem overwhelming, uncomfortable, and even threatening to some educators as well as their students because in rethinking your worldview, you are confronted with the harmful effects of your belief systems which necessitates building cultural competency. Taylor recognizes that social justice-oriented reforms require “courage, care, and compassion for oneself and one’s students” (2015, p. 131). Subsequently, Taylor reassures us that educators “resistance to and unmasking of dominant social frameworks does not need to take place on a grand scale” (2015, p. 132). She suggests that teachers, administrators, and parents start with bringing non-dominant narratives to the forefront of the classroom and then begin to re-examine the ways they might unintentionally perpetuate or reproduce social inequalities based on their positionality.

Zembylas (2012) revisits the topic of students’ emotional responses to discussions about racism and anti-racism in higher education. Interestingly, this article offers a brief personal account of his classroom experiences in a post-conflict setting. Zembylas argues that anti-racist and critical pedagogies have not provided strategic tools for educators to guide their students through the “troubled knowledge” they bring into the classroom (2012, p. 113). Troubled knowledge has the potential for divergent and emotionally disruptive viewpoints that are informed by an individual’s lived experience.

He cautions that critical pedagogies can be polarizing and in fact ineffective “when there is a clash of narratives and memories” (2012, p. 119). Furthermore, he suggests that producing potentially transformative experiences for students would require that educators deviate from typical rational arguments “about the moral value of anti-racism” and begin to build applicable “pedagogical strategies” that focus on the “emotional complexities” of this type of learning (Zembylas, 2012, p. 123).

Zembylas presents Linqvist’s (2004) strategic empathy as a pedagogical resource that “opens up affective spaces which might eventually disrupt the emotional roots of troubled knowledge” (2012, p. 114). More specifically, Zembylas promotes a “reconciliatory perspective of empathy” which is distinctive given that it is politically focused and process oriented (2012, p. 120). Zembylas offers two qualities of reconciliatory empathy that make it a useful pedagogical tool. First, reconciliatory empathy allows for the acceptance of others troubled knowledge and the subsequent recognition that we share the same fundamental rights (p. 121). As a result, space is created for re-establishing relationships by refusing to label individuals as good or bad. Secondly, Zembylas informs us that reconciliatory empathy encourages the emotional receptivity of “traumatic racial injury, in whatever form this is manifest, and tolerates ambivalence for paradoxes as an enriching part of creating an ongoing workable relationship with the other” (2012, p. 121). From this viewpoint, reconciliatory empathy capitalizes on difficult emotional realities by first acknowledging that they exist and then understanding them as part of the complicated tapestries of self.

To start putting pedagogies of strategic empathy into practice, Zembylas recommends that educators work toward establishing “affective spaces” in their

classrooms for students to connect through “multiple stories of troubled knowledge” (p. 121). Zembylas himself writes:

It is through a deep emotional exploration of these stories that teachers and students will become able to see common patterns in their emotional lives to realize how common humanity is made, and what its consequences are for positioning themselves in interconnected ways (2012, p. 122).

Furthermore, in discussions of race and anti-racism, Zembylas advises educators to strategically resist the expected urge to take sides. Although suspending moral judgments may seem incomprehensible, Zembylas contends that it is essential because “connectedness with the other without rushing to categorize him or her as ‘perpetrator’, ‘misguided’ or ‘evil’ is precisely what avoids premature closure and sustains the possibility of transformation” (2012, p. 118). Zembylas concedes that reconciling students’ troubled knowledge with socially just perspectives is a “long and difficult task”, so a single transformative course is not enough (2012, p. 114). Institutions of higher education should consider ways to support not only faculty but also students and staff in their anti-racist work. That being said, it is essential for educators to listen intently to the views of their students across time and differing points of view as well as in spaces beyond the traditional classroom.

Addressing the Whiteness in the Room

I am frequently reminded of something author Eula Bliss once said, “One of the privileges of being white is that you can coast through your experience. You can coast through your life without having to think about what your race means to other people and what your existence in a community means to the people around you.” (Tippet, 2017). I

admit that for a good portion of my life, I had been coasting and sometimes fall back into that thoughtless routine. In her 2017 article, Swan notes that when speaking specifically to white people about whiteness, she chose to follow the practice of Shelly Tochluk (2010) and “use pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’ to speak directly to white people” (p. 550). She acknowledges that this “may be potentially distancing for people of colour,” but the purpose is to position herself “in relation to whiteness” (2017, p. 550). Moreover, Swan emphasizes that “In speaking to white people, I am not recentering whiteness but calling it to account” (p. 550). In this section, I plan to follow suit and address whiteness to hold myself and others accountable.

In her book, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*, DiAngelo (2018) identifies white people’s defensive reactions to “racial discomfort” as “white fragility” (p. 2). Tied to emotions such as “anger, fear and guilt”, white fragility is exhibited through behaviors like “argumentation, silence, and withdrawal from stress inducing situations” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 2). DiAngelo argues that in conversations about race and listening across difference the abovementioned responses, “work to reinstate white equilibrium as they repel the challenge, return our racial comfort, and maintain our dominance within the racial hierarchy, triggered by discomfort and anxiety, it is born of superiority and entitlement” (2018, p. 2). Evidently, the equilibrium that white people seek is rooted in the maintenance of white hegemonic structures as discussed by Boyler and Zembylas (2003). She goes on to describe “the pillars of whiteness” or the “unexamined beliefs” that whites inadvertently uphold yet consistently fall back on to justify a defensive stance (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 3). They include a belief in the “good/bad binary” of racism, that racism involves isolated

individual incidents as opposed to implicating much larger systems of oppression and an unbridled sense of entitlement (p. 71). Since it serves their interests, DiAngelo asserts that whites are intrinsically invested in preserving a system that retains a “racial status quo” (2018, p.3).

According to DiAngelo (2018), white fragility is often brought on in the instances where we are being seen racially as a group. In order to develop “cross-racial skills,” she argues that we need to start with “naming our race” (p.7). On a more personal note, DiAngelo offers the following:

However, like most white people raised in the US, I was not taught to see myself in racial terms and certainly not to draw attention to my race or to behave as if it mattered in any way. Of course, I was made aware that *somebody’s* race mattered and if race was discussed, it would be theirs, not mine (p.7).

Moreover, DiAngelo (2018) contends that “Predominately white neighborhoods are not outside of race—they are teeming with race” (p. 37). If this line of thinking holds true, then predominately white institutions of higher education are at risk of perpetuating a “white racial frame” that includes “a limited worldview, a reliance on deeply problematic depictions of people of color, comfort in segregation with no sense that there might be value in knowing people of color, and internalized superiority” (p. 37). The result according to DiAngelo (2018) is that, “our capacity to engage constructively across racial lines becomes profoundly limited” (p. 37). I agree with DiAngelo’s point of view, because my own experience confirms it. For me, being “racially unmoored” has certainly produced intense emotions akin to a fight or flight response (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 14). In instances where whites decide to participate in dialogues across racial difference,

DiAngelo warns us that our “continual retreat from the discomfort of authentic racial engagement in a culture in which racial disparity is infused limits white people’s ability to form connections across racial lines and perpetuates a cycle that keeps racism in place” (2018, p. 111). DiAngelo suggests that if whites were to resist the tendency to habitually disengage and retreat, we could build the “racial stamina” necessary to stay in the moment and develop greater self-awareness.

Ahmed (2004) observes that as white progressives begin to hear the realities of racism and start to unpack our complicit behavior, often, the “impulse” is to take action (p. 8). While she understands our urge to take action, Ahmed also finds it profoundly problematic and warns that “the desire to act, to move, or even to move on, can stop the message ‘getting through’ (2004, p. 8). She notes that whites inevitably end up asking, ‘but what are white people to do’ (p.8). Ahmed cautions us with the following reply:

But the question, in all of these modes of utterance, can work to *block* hearing; in moving on from the present towards the future, it can also move away from the object of critique, or place the white subject ‘outside’ that critique in the present of the hearing. (2004, p.8).

In response to Ahmed’s concerns, Swan (201) proposes listening, confronting ignorance, and generous encounters as a “way in which white academics can contribute to praxis as a kind of ‘not doing, doing’ (p. 549).

When it comes to the topic of listening across difference, another point of contention is the role of silence. In a 2016 article, Applebaum discusses a form of white silence called “listening silence” and discusses the implications for pedagogy as well as its problematic “discursive effects” (p.389). She agrees with previous educational

research that describes white silence as a “distancing strategy” to avoid any close examination of white ignorance or white innocence (pp. 392, 398). Systemic white ignorance is identified by Applebaum as, “the practice of not knowing and being unwilling to hear what those who experience racism are saying” (2016, p. 395). Additionally, she refers to white innocence as, “the belief held by well-intentioned whites who are convinced that they cannot be implicated in the oppression of others” (2016, p.397).

DiAngelo (2018) argues that “*white progressives cause the most daily damage to people of color*” (p. 5). She explains that white progressives, “will put our energy into making sure that others see us as having arrived” rather than undertaking the lifelong work of “self-awareness, continuing education, relationship building, and actual antiracist practice” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 5). Applebaum’s point of departure is listening silence, which she distinguishes as “white silence that maintains white innocence but does not necessarily support resistance to learning” (2016, p. 392).

Applebaum describes a classroom experience where she observed her students’ white silence, as well as what Yancy (2008) refers to as “tarrying”. For Yancy (2015), tarrying with whiteness “demands that white people *dwell* with the emotional and cognitive dissonance that will be inevitably experienced as they become more and more attentive to the ways in which they are entangled in the social and psychic web of racism” (p. 26). Adding to Yancy’s assertion, it should also be noted that for DiAngelo (2018) disrupting white fragility also requires tarrying with whiteness (p.14). Applebaum notes that initially, she interpreted her students active listening as an indication of their willingness to learn about the other. According to Yancy, tarrying does involve forms of

“courageous listening” as well as “humility, and the capacity to be touched” (2015, p. 26). However, given the social interplay that is required of participants in dialogues across difference, Applebaum eventually concludes that white listening silence “is itself a manifestation of complicity and needs to be disrupted” because students of color are left to interpret the meaning of white silence and then navigate toward a response not knowing how it will be received (2016, p. 389).

Subsequently, Applebaum (2016) discusses the pedagogical implications for socially just educators who recognize the discursive effects of white listening silence in their classroom. First, in order to raise student consciousness about the effects of their silence, she urges educators to ask: “What does your silence do in this context even if you don’t intend it to do what it does?” (p. 403). Otherwise, Applebaum contends that educators are destined to perpetuate white ignorance by maintaining their “focus on the truth of white rationales” which enables students to “cling to the truth of their rationales because they are socially sanctioned” (p. 403).

Second, while white listening silence allows students to “tarry with the critique of whiteness”, Applebaum notes that for Yancy, “emphasis on tarrying implies that white discomfort must not be relieved and that white desires for safety must not be satisfied at the expense of students of color” (p. 403). Furthermore, DiAngelo (2018) argues that for whites, the “racial status quo is comfortable” and to move forward “we need to build our capacity to sustain the discomfort of not knowing, the discomfort of being racially unmoored, the discomfort of racial humility” (p. 14). Without understanding the discursive effects of their white listening silence, Applebaum also warns that if given the opportunity, students will retreat to the comfort and safety of silence.

Third, when reflecting on her initial assumptions about white listening silence in the classroom, Applebaum concludes that it is a “discursive move that can have violent discursive effects on students of color” due to the “relational context” of the silence (p. 404). Specifically, she draws attention to the problem of safe spaces in social justice classrooms. Applebaum pointedly remarks, “While white students might demand the existence of trust before they speak, for students of color it is only when white students engage with them that trust can develop and alliance identities can be formed” (p.404). To break the practice of passive listening in dialogues across difference, Applebaum suggests that educators encourage their white students to check what is being heard by asking clarifying questions that ensure their understanding.

Arao and Clemens (2013), authors of the article “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice”, observe that “when the dialogue moves from polite to provocative” students in higher education settings will often “invoke in protest the common ground rules associated with the idea of safe space” (p. 135). According to Arao and Clemens, a safe space is defined as a “learning environment that allows students to engage with one another over controversial issues with honesty, sensitivity, and respect” (p. 135). When students experience an infringement of safe space ground rules, their negative responses can be attributed to the “conflation of safety with comfort” (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 135).

As described in their case study, Arao and Clemens (2013) note the polarizing effect of a diversity and inclusion activity called One Step Forward, One Step Backward. Participants included a group of resident assistants who were taking part in a training program around issues of social justice and diversity. The exercise asks participants to

stand in a line and voluntarily respond to a list of statements associated with social identity, privilege, and oppression by stepping forward, backward, or staying in place. The key learning objectives for participants included an introduction to “the concepts of social and cultural identity, power, and privilege” as well as “reflection on how these forces moved through and shaped their lives; and draw connections between the session content and their roles as student leaders” (Arao & Clemens, 2013, p. 136). Admittedly, these learning objectives were considered overly ambitious given the troubled knowledge (Zembylas, 2012) this exercise uncovers in the span of just 90-minutes.

In this case, and as expected, the One Step Forward, One Step Backward exercise produced a disquieting visual representation of social stratification and inequality that was constructed by the participants lived experiences. Agreeing with Garrison’s (1996), Boler and Zembyla’s (2003), as well as Taylor’s (2015) conclusions regarding the intrinsic risks of entering into social justice dialogues, Arao and Clemens (2013) note that it is both counterproductive and more importantly “simply impossible” to eliminate the risk involved (p.136). Instead, they suggest a revision of the language around social justice dialogues to correctly reflect the challenge at hand rather than neglecting to acknowledge the risk involved or offer the opportunity to retreat into safety from the outset. Arao and Clemens insist that the simple substitution of the novel term *brave space* for *safe space* alters the mindset of students entering into social justice dialogues.

Border Crossing and Boundary Spanning

We collaborate with the structures of separation because they promise to protect us against one of the deepest fears at the heart of being human—the fear of having a live encounter with alien “otherness,” whether the other is a student, a colleague, a subject, or a self-dissenting voice within. We fear encounters in which the other is free to be itself, to speak its own truth, to tell us what we may

not wish to hear. We want those encounters on our own terms, so we can control their outcomes, so that they will not threaten our view of world and self.

—Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 2009

Community Engagement Professionals as Border Crossers

Dostilio (2017) argues, “We cannot separate the identity of a partnership from the behaviors of people who constitute the partnership, just as we cannot claim institutional orientations that are not consonant with the orientations of the people within those institutions” (pp. 380-381). That being said, community-engaged scholars have just begun to understand the significance of boundary spanners and border crossers in higher education.

In her book, *Engaging in Social Partnerships: Democratic Practices for Campus-Community Partnerships*, Keith (2015) offers a framework for border-crossing partnership practice as an effective way to advance democratic community-university collaborations. She argues that civic-minded professionals approach social partnerships from a citizen’s point of view rather than the expert or designated problem solver. To illustrate the progression from normal professional practice to “wise practice”, Keith utilizes French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977, 1989) “thinking tools” of habitus, field, and capital in conjunction with Aristotle’s concept of phronesis (2015, p. 111). First, Keith (2015) explains that habitus, “involves the practitioner’s dispositions and orientation” which are shaped by one’s lived experiences and associations with specific social groups (pp. 111-112). Second, field refers to the specific locations in which a practitioner’s dispositions and orientation are established and then put into practice (p. 111). Third, capital includes the “resources the practitioner utilizes in a given field” such

as cultural, social, economic and symbolic resources (pp. 111, 113). Keith draws our attention to the interconnectedness of these concepts when she notes, “Habitus is always relational and oriented to position taking, which means that fields are always constituted through the use of one’s capitals and the play of power” (p. 113). Furthermore, Keith notes that habitus, field, and capital are suited to the border crossing framework and exploring equitable social change because Bourdieu utilized these concepts as thinking tools to examine how social dominance and structural inequalities are maintained (p. 112).

DiAngelo (2018) complicates Keith’s analysis of habitus by noting that, “When there is disequilibrium in the habitus—when social cues are unfamiliar and/or when they are a challenge to our capital—we use strategies to regain our balance” (p. 103). Therefore, whites who are experiencing “racial stress” will defensively seek to re-establish “white racial equilibrium” (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 103). DiAngelo further explains that, “Habitus maintains our social comfort and helps us regain it when those around us do not act in familiar and acceptable ways. We don’t respond consciously to disequilibrium in the habitus; we respond unconsciously” (p. 103). As a result, the border crossing professional, despite their good intentions, will exhibit white fragility more often than not. Therefore, even the most conscious of border crossing professionals must take up Yancy’s (2015) plea to tarry and “not move too quickly when confronted by the muck and mire of their own whiteness” (p. 3). If not, the need to reestablish white racial equilibrium will maintain our complicity and undermines our partnerships.

With all that being said, situated between normalized habitus and wise practice is border crossing or third space. Keith (2015) defines border crossing as “a disruption of

Self-Other relations that puts into question what is normal inside the border; it is an entry into uncharted territory” (p. 121). For Keith, Self-Other transformation involves “undoing and unlearning ways of being and relating that are deeply embodied in our identities and part of the normal workings of our institutions” (2015, p. 15). Furthermore, Keith describes third space as the “borderlands” or the space where social change can happen (p. 90). Interestingly, the concept of third space originated with Oldenburg and Brissett’s (1982) discussion of informal public spaces that exist beyond home and work that offer a friendly atmosphere and neutral ground for civil association.

Not unlike Tocqueville’s (1835/2012) observation that civil associations are essential to a functioning democracy, Keith (2015) stresses the significance of associated life to the work of border-crossing democratic civic professionals (p. 91). Keith observes that there are three forces for change, including professional, cultural and democratic (p. 92). In particular, Keith notes, “Democratic forces stress commitments to the common good and democratic community” (p. 92). To underscore his point, Keith refers to Brint’s (2001) definition of communities as: “aggregates of people who share common activities and/or beliefs and who are bound together *principally* by relations of affect, loyalty, common values, and or personal concern” (p. 92). Furthermore, Keith (2015) describes the transformation that is possible when building community becomes the focus of generating change:

When change focuses on creating community, the focus goes beyond the technical aspects of a project’s goals to relational tasks such as building trust, fellow feelings, and relationships, which support open communication and collective intelligence. New identities and ways of interacting, standards, norms, and

rules—in general, new practices—emerge organically and the change is more lasting (p. 92).

Ideally, this approach to community engagement activates a cultural transformation where power asymmetries, oppressive normalcies, and related conflicts can be addressed.

If Bourdieu's (1977, 1989) habitus, field, and, capital assist us with understanding what exists, Keith (2015) informs us that “phronesis is about what should be” or in terms of professional practice “what we should try to enact in our particular practice situation” (p. 113). Keith focuses on three aspects of phronesis that function cohesively and they include: embodying the virtues, making sense of the (practice) situation, and constructing and enacting the good (pp. 104, 109). For, Keith embodying virtues entails habits of mind, heart, and action based upon ideals that are generated from our lived experiences in a community (p. 115). These dispositions and orientations are not learned and in fact, are brought out in situations as needed to shape ethical practices devoted to the common good (p.115).

To explain making sense of the (practice) situation, Keith informs us that the wise practitioner who is being guided by embodied virtues can gain understanding that leads to action for the good (p. 115). She goes on to remind us that sensemaking is not always confined to the individual and in partnership, it can be achieved by the collective community (p. 109). Moreover, Keith provides multiple avenues for a wise practitioner to achieve understanding such as, felt sense, empathy, insight, discernment, creativity, dialogue and deliberation (p. 115). Finally, Keith describes how situational ethics and virtues guide the wise practitioner to take action for the good (pp.109, 115). She notes that constructing and enacting the good can be fluid or formal and include individuals or

groups that participate in reflection, research, dialogue, and deliberation depending on the practice situation (p. 109).

In 2015, Watkins promoted psychosocial accompaniment as a means to decolonize the field of psychology and intentionally reposition the expert knowledge of its practitioners. The concept of accompaniment can contribute to the development of democratic community-university collaborations in that it provides community engagement professionals, faculty as well as students with a unique relational approach to partnership building and co-creating knowledge that explicitly prioritizes the experientially derived knowledge of community members. According to Watkins, “Accompaniment requires a reorientation of the subjectivity, interpersonal practices, and critical understanding of the accompanier so that (s)he can stand alongside others who desire listening, witnessing, advocacy, space to develop critical inquiry and research, and joint imagination and action to address desired and needed changes” (p, 324). She goes on to inform us that accompaniment has its origins in liberation theology of Latin America and is squarely situated in the work of revolutionary philosopher and psychiatrist Franz Fanon. Watkins (2015) draws our attention to the origins of the word accompaniment noting, “It draws from the Latin *ad cum panis*, to break bread with one another” (p. 326).

In the following, Watkins uses Farmer (2013) to further illustrate the depth of accompaniment:

To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, so to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end. There’s an element of mystery, of openness, of trust, in accompaniment. The companion, the

accompagneur, says: “I’ll go with you and support you on your journey wherever it leads. I’ll share your fate for a while—and by “a while” I don’t mean a little while. Accompaniment is about sticking with a task until it’s deemed completed—not by the accompagnateur, but by the person being accompanied (p. 234).

Above, Watkins notes that accompaniment “does not necessarily require professionalization”, although the term is used across multiple disciplines such as “social medicine, peace activism, human rights, pastoral support, and social and liberation psychology” (pp. 326, 337). Accompaniment might not require professionalization; however, accompaniment is inarguably embedded in the professional practice of all the fields mentioned above. With this in mind, accompaniment is or should be equally inherent to community engagement practices within higher education.

In addition to learning how to “practice horizontally, moving alongside others”, accompaniment involves a process of unlearning for the accompanier in that they are compelled to confront their complicity in perpetuating forms of historical oppression. According to Watkins (2015), “It entails engaging in a process of psychic decolonization that enables us to step aside from modes of relationship that reinscribe colonial hierarchies of power and value” (p. 330). In this case, the accompanier uniquely assumes the responsibility of unlearning rather than placing community members in the all too familiar role as educator.

The practice of accompaniment can be found in areas of conflict where the act of witnessing is considered crucial to exposing the multiple traumas experienced by

community members. Watkins (2015) explains the relevance of the accompanier as a witness to the lived experience of those they are accompanying in the following:

This witnessing is a particularly crucial antidote when the events or conditions suffered have been repressed or denied by the wider culture. The creation of opportunities for testimony enables those who have suffered violence and social exclusion to exercise their agency and to bring their experience into the public arena to be acknowledged and witnessed” (pp. 327-328).

For this study, the practice of accompaniment is significant in that it synthesizes many of the ideas found in Garrison’s (1996) Deweyan theory of democratic listening as well as Keith’s framework for border-crossing partnership practice.

Watkins (2015) illustrates the intersection of the two concepts when he argues that “If we are to honor what we come to understand by listening closely to other human beings and the places they inhabit, then our professional practices must come to include accompaniment, and the advocacy, witness, solidarity, and critical understanding and action that flow from it (p. 339). As one can see, accompaniment involves intently listening to understand, unlearning oppressive behavior and building authentic relationships that promote the co-creation of knowledge and community transformation. With this in mind, accompaniment has the potential not only to deepen community engagement practices but also restructure our partnerships in more democratic ways that also prioritize the needs of the community rather than the university.

Prioritizing the Boundary-Spanning Role

In 2014, Adams reported on a case study that assists practitioners with identifying community boundary spanners in community-university partnerships. According to

Adams (2014), the purpose of this study was to investigate the “characteristics, roles, and motivations of community boundary spanners in university-community partnerships” (p. 113). Adams notes that her research fills a gap in the literature because previous studies have primarily focused on boundary spanners from the institutional viewpoint.

In this study, institutional partners from a statewide university-community partnership with multiple sites were tasked with identifying 10 community boundary spanners. Data were collected through interviews with the selected boundary spanners. Additionally, a focus group of institutional partner stakeholders was conducted as well as document analysis to provide context because the boundary spanners were from three different counties and represented different phases of partnership. Data were analyzed using constant comparison analysis. More importantly, a conceptual framework developed by Weertz and Sandmann (2010) was used to identify the prominent characteristics of institutional boundary spanners. Specifically, Weertz and Sandmann (2010) focused on the qualities of task orientation and social closeness. Adams (2014) utilized this conceptual framework as a guide for identifying indicators of task orientation and social closeness as well as characteristics, roles, and motivations. Additionally, Adams explored the impact of the partnership phase on the capability of the boundary spanner.

Adams (2010) reports that the community boundary spanners were communicative visionaries, who are able to comprehend multiple perspectives, which then facilitates collaborative planning for the future. Moreover, Adams (2010) notes that the community boundary spanners understood their roles as “resource broker, relationship builder, or community leader” and their “motivations ranged from personal

motives to community-focus intentions” (p. 115). Interestingly, Adams points out that the phase of the partnership did not have an impact on the capabilities of the community boundary spanners and suggests that they enter the partnerships with these particular qualities.

According to Giroux (2007), “Border pedagogy provides opportunities for teachers to deepen their own understanding of the discourse of various others in order to effect a more dialectical self-critical understanding of the limits partiality, and particularity of their own values, and pedagogy” (p. 26). Furthermore, Giroux notes that “By being able to listen critically to the voices of their students, teachers also become border-crossers through their ability to both make different narratives available to themselves and to legitimate difference as a basic condition for understanding the limits of one's own knowledge”

Of course, critics may want to question the legitimacy of border crossing. In the following, Hooks (1994) responds to this valid concern:

If we really want to create a cultural climate where biases can be challenged and changed, all border crossings must be seen as valid and legitimate. This does not mean that they are not subjected to critique or critical interrogation, or that there will not be many occasions when the crossings of the powerful into the terrains of the powerless will not perpetuate existing structures (p. 131).

Furthermore, Hooks (1994) expresses concern that without “concrete counter-examples” of boundary crossing thorough collaborative dialogues “we are all in danger of losing contact, of creating conditions that would make contact possible” (p. 130).

Place-building for Democratic Community Engagement

To be in truth, we must know how to observe and reflect and speak and listen, with passion and with discipline, in the circle gathered around a given subject.

—Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 2009

The Significance of Third Space and Third Place

In his book *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg (1989), introduces the concept of third place and conveys his nostalgic reverence for a time when individuals from all walks of life congregated at the corner cafe, coffee shop, and local bar to enjoy their leisure time in the company of others. Oldenburg describes these down-to-earth public spaces as a “home away from home” where the mood is good-natured and the central activity is dynamic conversation among regular visitors (pp. 20-42). While critics of Oldenburg might argue that he paints a hopelessly antiquated picture of associational life, the concept of third place remains an important one in that these spaces provide a forum for democratic participation where individuals can collectively claim their civic identity.

In the same way that Waks (2011) notes the significance of transactional listening-in-conversation and cooperative friendship to Dewey's theory of democratic society, Oldenburg (1989) insists that third place association is fundamental to the preservation of civic life and citizen involvement in the democratic process. Specifically, Oldenburg reminds us “face-to-face grass-roots participation in the political process is essential in a democracy” (1989, p. 70). Furthermore, Oldenburg argues that third places offer “the most democratic experience people can have and allows them to be more fully themselves, for it is salutary in such situations that all shed their social uniforms and insignia and reveal more of what lies beneath or beyond them” (1989, p. 25).

It is apparent that the primary activity of a third place is socializing; however, to demonstrate the political relevance of third places, Oldenburg (1989) highlights the role of these spaces in social action and political movements. At the same time, he readily admits that, “the third place is not a universal remedy for all social and personal ills, nor will the kind of association it offers appeal to everyone” (Oldenburg, 1989, p. 84). Finally, there is a discussion of the great divide that has been growing between adults and youth in our society. Essentially, Oldenburg argues that adults have actively sought to “put a great deal of distance between themselves and youth” and that they have done so “in a relatively short period of time” (p. 263). Oldenburg then urges us to begin reintegrating youth into community life and to develop connections for youth across generations.

Smyth (2014) contends that universities are uniquely positioned to offer neighboring communities an inclusive third place or third space for alternative learning opportunities. He observes that universities “need to move beyond broadly-worded aspirations and strategies relating to public engagement and civic responsibility and instead commit to and help drive a culture of action and active partnership between their institution and their wider community” (Smyth, 2014, para. 13). For Smyth, this reimagined university would offer its campus, courses, and resources to learners, academics and public scholars who are interested sharing spaces, knowledge, and experiences. To further illustrate the potential of informal education opportunities, he points to the Ragged University, rooted in the Ragged School (Guthrie, 1847) movement that started during the 19th century in the United Kingdom.

To a certain degree, Smyth's vision is realized in the format of Drexel University's Side-By-Side community-based learning courses. Side-By-Side emanates from Temple University's International Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program which positions traditional college students alongside incarcerated students. In this case, traditional college students learn alongside often underrepresented community students from the surrounding neighborhoods. Rickards (2015) reported on a mixed methods study to determine if Side-By-Side students acquired 21st-century skills. Rickards found that Side-By-Side, "provides a structure in which students are democratically engaged and may acquire the 21st-century skills required to be successful in our ever-changing global economy" (2015, p. 158).

Recognizing the scarcity of community voice found in the literature on community university partnerships, McIlrath (2012) conducted an examination of civic engagement and service-learning from the community perspective. In the article, McIlrath describes service-learning as "an approach to learning and teaching that challenges ideas of higher education as a "sacred cow" that is distant, elitist, and exclusive" (2012, p. 139). While this statement rings true and service-learning is broadly considered an impactful pedagogical approach, tensions seem to persist around the motives of the ivory tower. McIlrath (2012) urges, "If our vision for the higher education system moving forward to 2030 means anything, then we must put the community voice and perspective at the center of our plans for engagement" (p. 151). Furthermore, Morton and Bergbauer (2015) suggest constructing shared spaces that build and reinforce community-campus relationships as essential to critical service-learning noting, "The evidence of a shared, stronger community that we look for over time includes greater

mutual knowledge of one another and softening of the boundaries between campus and community” (p.27).

Re-conceptualizing Shared Spaces in Community-Campus Partnerships

In a 2015 study, Morton and Bergbauer describe an eight-year service-learning project where multiple spaces were established for campus as well as community members to “meet, reflect, and act together” (p. 18). Without existing exemplars for community engagement that consider the “real and imagined barriers separating campus and community”, Morton and Bergbauer looked to “safe space” as well as “third place” (Oldenburg, 1996), and “free space” (Evans & Boyte, 1986) for inspiration (p. 23). Originally conceived during the Civil Rights Movement, free spaces are, “the environments in which people are able to learn a new self-respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue” (Evans & Boyte, 1986, p. 17). Furthermore, Evans and Boyte note, “free spaces are settings between private lives and large-scale institutions where ordinary citizens can act with dignity, independence, and vision” which can include, but are not limited to “religious organizations, clubs, self-help and mutual aid societies, reform groups, neighborhood civic, and ethnic groups” (1986, pp. 17-18). Of the three examples of shared space highlighted by Morton and Bergbauer, free space appears to encapsulate the ideal type to foster voluntary association as conceived by Tocqueville.

Morton and Bergbauer (2015) describe several existing models of critical service-learning that emphasize building and strengthening relationships in shared spaces rather than focusing on community outcomes. First, Pompa (2005) established a dialogic space within correctional institutions where university students learn alongside incarcerated

men and women. Second, Ross (2012) created an innovative pedagogical space that addressed both real and perceived power differentials by re-conceptualizing the classroom as a “borderland” that lies between community and campus (p.67). According to Ross (2012), when community knowledge and expertise are prioritized, “New types of relationships are possible that begin to blur the lines between community professionals and students, resulting in opportunities to have an impact on real community problems and academic fields of study” (p.67). Third, Steinman (2011) drew upon their experiences with First Nations, as they worked toward reconciliation with the Canadian government, to reimagine higher education service-learning as “making space”. This conception recognizes the democratic potential of this work pointing out and challenging, “hegemonic power/knowledge regimes” (p. 5).

Morton and Bergbauer (2015) provide a particularly relevant example of cultivating community by giving prominence to relationship building in higher education service-learning. Uniquely, they emphasize hospitality, compassion, listening, and reflection across social and cultural boundaries as essential practices for socially just civic engagement. They pose the following question: “Do some forms of service have more potential for both personal and social change as well as transformation than others, or do “thick” practices of all forms of service contain the potential for change and transformation?” (p. 18). In an earlier article, Morton (1995) argues that approaches to service should be considered as interrelated yet separate paradigms (i.e., charity, project, and social change) with the potential for thin and thick representations of each rather than being placed along a continuum. While thin practices fall short of the established ideals of service, Morton (1995) explains that:

The thick versions of each paradigm are grounded in deeply held, internally coherent values; match means and ends; describe a primary way of interpreting and relating to the world; offer a way of defining problems and solutions; and suggest a vision of what a transformed world might look like (p. 28).

More significantly, Morton and Bergbauer (2015) identify the “quality of the relationships at their center” as a fundamental thread in thick representations of all three service-learning paradigms (p. 18). Following Palmer (2009), they recognize that these relationships acknowledge, cherish, and cultivate the hidden wholeness of people and places.

In 2005, Clark and Young utilized spatial theory “to expand and complicate understandings of “changing places” in service-learning” (p 73). They observed that “Simply moving bodies from one place to another, and standing in someone else’s shoes, so to speak, may not do justice to the complexity and significant work of service-learning” (2005, p. 73). According to Clark and Young (2005), the emergence of critical theory and pedagogy in service-learning should have reoriented “students’ attention toward activism and social justice”; however, the transformation of student perspectives remained the primary focus of service-learning (2005, p. 73). They contend that “Rather than be invested solely in the transformation of individual lives or in specific successes and failures, understanding how space is dynamic and will change meanings and social relations as individuals move in and out, as communities ebb and flow, will help transform the meaning of service-learning.” (Clark & Young, 2005, p. 84). Furthermore, Clark and Young (2005) build on (2004) to argue that an important part of service-learning is “making new space” where knowledge may flow among participants (p. 76).

Tomlinson and Lipsitz (2019) offer their conception of insubordinate spaces, which can function as both a refinement and expansion of what is most important in community-university partnerships that tie back even more tightly to Tocqueville and Dewey. Specifically, they point out that as democratic opportunities and aspirations are targeted for dismantling by our social institutions, oppressed peoples are assembling mechanisms for resistance to reshape their futures. Tomlinson and Lipsitz note that as people strive for self-determination and social justice, they engage in place-making that utilizes many kinds of insubordinate spaces to form new identities, identifications, affiliations, and alliances. While insubordinate spaces are not necessarily tied to higher education institutions, their function as environments for “envisioning and enacting new ways of knowing and new ways of being” overlaps with our best hopes for what universities can be (Tomlinson & Lipsitz, 2019, p. 7).

The authors argue that new politics and polities—forged in reciprocal practices of speaking and listening, teaching and learning—are emerging from insubordinate spaces across the nation. Central to this movement are the practices of accompaniment and improvisation. They define accompaniment as “a disposition, a sensibility, and a pattern of behavior...a commitment based upon cultivating capacity for making connections with others, identifying with them, and helping them” (Tomlinson & Lipsitz, 2019, p. 23). In practice, accompaniment entails folks with diverse experiences, understandings and statuses joining together in a spirit of mutual appreciation and support. They further explain that in accompaniment, there is a refusal to ignore the fundamentally social nature of life that many of our anti-social institutions have sought to mask. Much like Tocqueville’s understanding of democracy in America, accompaniment is concerned with

building associations and relationships, “finding common ground and uniting around the concerns, interests, and ideas of people with the greatest need for profound social change” (Tomlinson & Lipsitz, 2019, p. 24).

Since insubordinate spaces exist in opposition to subordinating spaces that are, by necessity, well-structured monologues of domination, they must employ improvisation in the dialogues that carve them out. Unlike the bureaucratic predictability of subordinating spaces, insubordinate spaces are characterized by spontaneity coupled with a moral and social responsibility to companions. Tomlinson and Lipsitz point out that:

As a pedagogical, epistemological, and political practice inside insubordinate spaces, improvisation opens doors to a new way of life grounded in the promotion of possibility. It is a device for turning passive victims of circumstances into active agents of emancipation and a form of alchemy that transforms poison into medicine and humiliation into honor (2019, p. 35).

Moreover, within a larger group dialogue, improvisation requires an attention toward what has come before and what will come after in a way that requires participants to remain alert, active and empathetic.

Social capital, intrinsic motivation, and self-efficacy for youth

Coleman (1988) established the importance of social capital to the field of education by offering empirical evidence of how social capital in both the family and community is positively correlated with high school graduation rates. Additionally, Coleman (1988) identified three elements of social capital that include trusting relationships, social networks, and norms with effective sanctions. In a more recent study, Warren, Hong, Rubin, and Uy (2009) defined social capital as “a resource that

inheres the relationships between people, allowing them to act collectively to achieve agreed-upon ends” (p. 2212). Through an empirical case study of community-based organizations (CBOs) that engage parents in marginalized neighborhoods, they found that parental involvement with CBO’s had a positive impact on student learning (Warren et al., 2009). Moreover, it was determined that in the course of their involvement with CBO’s parents developed the skills necessary to collaborate with educators and community leaders which facilitated their transition into the role of change agents in their own community (Warren et al., 2009).

One unique perspective in the literature comes from Ginwright, Cammarota, and Noguera (2005), who suggest that policymakers should work towards increasing opportunities for urban youth to participate in the democratic process. Ginwright et al. (2005) utilize Sampson and Morenoff’s (1999) idea of social capital for youth as a theoretical framework for pursuing social justice in urban youth policy. This perspective is valuable to education reformers interested in cultivating social capital, because social capital is often the product of religion, traditions, and shared historical experiences rather than imposed public policy (Fukuyama, 2001). Sampson and Morenoff (1999) established that youth social capital “refers to the resource potential of personal and organizational networks, whereas collective efficacy is a task-specific construct that relates to the shared expectations and mutual engagement by adults in the active support and social control of children” (p. 635). Urban youth have been found to actively resist reform efforts imposed on them, because they are purposefully excluded from conversations about their communities that inform policies (Ginwright et al., 2005).

Recently, a case study by Thomas, Pate, and Ranson (2015) examined an attempt by an arts organization to revitalize an urban neighborhood in Memphis, Tennessee. Part of the revitalization effort involved starting an after-school arts program modeled after 826 Valencia a creative writing, publishing, and tutoring program for youth. It was designed to focus on creative placemaking as an inspiration for youth engagement and artmaking. Interestingly, Thomas et al. (2015) note that bridging social capital is connected to creativity because it “emerges from broad social circles made up of acquaintances that inspire thoughts” (p.75). From this perspective, marginalized youth participating community-university writing partnerships have the opportunity to build trusting relationships with volunteers and become part of a community of writers that inspire each other.

Dill and Ozer offer an ethnographic analysis of, “how network based social capital is activated and sustained for and by urban Black and Latinx youth” (2019 p. 1614). Their study focuses on the East Oakland Youth Development Center, a youth serving organization devoted to building skills, offering training, and promoting values necessary for kids to grow into dynamic leaders and active citizens within a community that has been facing a number of very serious social and economic challenges over the course of six decades. During after school hours, the center functions as a counterspace by offering free and comprehensive programming in the areas of art, career development, physical fitness and education. Based upon their analysis the authors determined that the program facilitates network-based social capital by offering staff members as culturally/ethnically matched role models and mentors who facilitate economic and educational opportunities to the participating youth.

While there is evidence that justifies creating opportunities for marginalized youth to develop and experience the positive effects of social capital found in the literature (i.e., mutual support, cooperation, and trust), there could be drawbacks based on the type of social capital being formed (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Warren et al. 2009). Putnam (2000) notes that bonding social capital, which is formed among homogenous groups creates “strong in-group loyalty” but it “may also create strong out-group antagonism” (p. 8). The fostering of social capital needs to be encouraged in ways that respect group loyalty, but also bring about the more positive aspects of social capital.

Researchers have made few attempts to measure social capital among youth and even fewer examine youth social capital outside of the family and school contexts (Harpham, 2002). Enfield and Nathaniel (2013) have adapted a valid social capital assessment for adults to measure youth social capital and a sense of place within a community-based program. The constructs of their social capital scale are agency, belonging, engagement, and trust for bonding, bridging and linking forms of social capital (Enfield & Nathaniel, 2013).

Turner (1995) studied the effects of instruction on student motivation for literacy and in her examination; she distilled three assumptions about literacy learning based on social constructivist theories. These assumptions are, learning is a social phenomenon, literacy is constructed in holistic activities, and social contexts are the appropriate settings for learning literacy. Additionally, Turner (1995) uses intrinsic motivation theory to describe how students come to value literacy learning. The results of the study showed that motivation is not only related to classroom context, but also to challenging open tasks that offer student control, satisfy interests, and allow

for collaboration (Turner, 1995).

Alternately, research by Dawes and Larson (2010) suggests that intrinsic motivation is not necessary for youth engagement in organized arts programs. In their study of ethnically diverse youth, they found that motivation could be cultivated by creatively and authentically connecting youth with programs (Dawes & Larson, 2010). This can be achieved by closely aligning activity goals with the participants' personal goals such as, learning for a future career, competence, and pursuing a purpose (Dawes & Larson, 2010).

Within the literature, self-efficacy is typically identified as a motivation construct. According to Zimmerman (2000), "Two decades of research have clearly established the validity of self-efficacy as a predictor of students' motivation and learning" (p. 89). It was Bandura (1977) who identified self-efficacy as a central element of social cognitive theory. Bandura (1997) established that perceived self-efficacy involves our beliefs in our capabilities to produce results that then determine our feelings, motivation, and behavior. Additionally, he describes four primary sources that inform self-efficacy and they include performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977).

More specifically, Pajares and Valiante's (1999) research on middle school students' writing self-efficacy beliefs have facilitated my understanding of learning within my problem of practice. Pajares and Valiante (1999) found that among a number of motivation constructs, writing self-efficacy was the only one that predicted writing competence. In his review of the literature on writing self-efficacy, Pajares (2003) notes that there is a need to assess self-efficacy beliefs with greater specificity

to determine “whether the origins of these beliefs differ for minority children and across socioeconomic levels” (p. 151). While my research may not focus on the origins of our youth participants’ self-efficacy beliefs, there is an opportunity to contribute to the literature on marginalized students’ writing self-efficacy. It is my impression that by providing students with support and encouragement to successfully complete challenging writing prompts, their self-efficacy beliefs can be reinforced and possibly shifted in a positive direction.

Conclusion

In the very ‘painstaking labour’ of getting closer, of speaking to each other, and of working for each other, we also get closer to ‘other others’. A community that is without ground, and yet not ungrounded.

—Sara Ahmed, *This Other and the Other Others*, 2002

This chapter has explored various theoretical frameworks for understanding the conditions and critical interventions that foster democratic civic engagement and nurture cooperative relationships across difference. Additionally, as a literature review, it offers a rationale for developing institutional practices that counter normative models of community-campus partnerships and begin to establish common ground with our neighbors. Specifically, it begins with a discussion of the importance of civil associations within our Democracy. Then it moves into the importance of dialogue within those groups and the resulting cooperative friendships. As these relationships evolve, civic life thrives as more people become border crossers and boundary spanners—especially with regard to racism and whiteness. At this point, citizens are participating in the process of accompaniment where they can share and build social capital. Altogether, this is how common ground is established across difference.

Swan (2017) argues that “common ground cannot be assumed but worked at” (p. 558). I would argue that common ground is based on relationships that need to be worked at. Recently, Rev. Jennifer Bailey and Lennon Flowers, the co-founders of The People’s Supper, a group that organizes “shared meals to build trust and connection among people of different identities and perspectives,” participated in a radio interview with *On Being* host Krista Tippett. In that interview, Rev. Bailey made reference to their organization’s guiding philosophy, “Relationships move at the speed of trust; social change moves at the speed of relationships.” (Tippett, 2019). Rev. Bailey went on to add the following:

There’s been no movement for justice or equity in this country that didn’t start with relationship. Doesn’t happen singularly. And so, as I think about this work of social change that we’re undertaking, the transformative practice of trying to build the America that we want to see, it’s a generational project. And thank God that I believe in a faith tradition that — my time currency is eternity (Tippett, 2019).

The rest of this dissertation is devoted to understanding Leon Ford’s Voices Project@Duquesne an after-school mentoring program that evolved into a community-engaged writing initiative and dialogic space as this sort of transformative process.

Chapter 3: METHODS AND DESIGN FOR ACTION

Methodology

This research aims to garner ideas from and identify specific features of the Leon Ford Voices Project@Duquesne to inform the design of future campus-community initiatives. Specifically, this chapter lays out the methods for a case study that examines the experiences of community and university partners who worked to develop and implement a writing initiative that brought people together to exchange ideas across vast social chasms. Specifically, the research was undertaken as a case study where qualitative interview data are supplemented with an autoethnographic analysis of my experiences in this community-engaged initiative. Below I address the research questions, my positionality with regard to the project, the data necessary for answering the research questions, as well as the collection and analysis of that data.

Purpose Research Questions

This dissertation focuses on identifying essential characteristics of initiatives that build cooperative relationships and solidarity to advance democratically engaged campus-community partnerships across difference. Part of this work involves attempting to understand the conditions that undermine these relationships, as well as the critical practices that strengthen them and the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them. Fundamentally, this research aimed to garner ideas from and identify specific features of the Leon Ford Voices Project@Duquesne to inform the design of future campus-community initiatives. To that end, my central research question and subordinate inquiry were:

Primary Question: What aspects of the program did the participants find most personally and professionally impactful?

Secondary Question: How did a sense of community within the experience contribute to participants learning?

Tertiary Question: What barriers to participation and engagement did participants experience?

Selection and Recruitment of Participants

Given the limited number of individuals who could serve as primary sources of data, a purposeful sample of four people who participated in Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne were asked to answer an open-ended writing prompt before they participated in a focus group. The following participants were selected to represent the various concerned individuals participating in the program. The researcher and those chosen to participate in the study were all former participants in Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne and were known to each other.

1. Leon Ford: In addition to founding the Voices Project, Leon also formed his LLC, Leon Ford Speaks. After his civil rights trial, Leon continued to seek justice and was eventually awarded \$5.5 million from the City of Pittsburgh. Exhausted by the process, he stepped away from the Voices Project. However, through his leadership, he reemerged to become well-respected worldwide as an activist, mental health ambassador, author, public speaker, and advocate for social change. In 2020, Leon developed a friendship with Pittsburgh Police Chief Scott Schubert. Together, they founded The Hear Foundation to convene programs addressing gun violence reduction, trauma, and workforce development in Pittsburgh. Leon has won many awards and was recently

recognized by Forbes 30 under 30 for social impact and was an Aspen Institute Civil Society Fellow. Our most recent collaboration was co-editing a special issue of the ethnic studies journal, *Kalfou*, which focuses on social movements, institutions, and relations.

2. Dr. Kathy Glass: Kathy is a highly regarded and beloved Professor of English at Duquesne University. In addition to her participation in Leon Ford's Voice Project, we have collaborated on bringing youth from a local summer camp to campus to learn about the history, poetry, and dance traditions of the Harlem Renaissance movement. Using Renaissance writers and artists to spark creativity, students were guided through the writing and revision process to produce original works of poetry that would be presented at their Summer Showcase. Additionally, she contributed an article to the special issue of *Kalfou* that I co-edited with Leon and organized a virtual poetry workshop with her students and a local organization serving senior citizens during the pandemic. Kathy has been deeply involved in campus social justice initiatives. For instance, she has co-chaired our annual Day for Learning and Speaking Out (DLSO) against racial injustice.

Interestingly, Leon was a featured speaker at the very first DLSO event.

3. Kevin McNair: Kevin is a close friend and longtime supporter of Leon. He is a co-creator of 1Nation Mentoring, an organization that serves African American youth ages 12-24 by cultivating their leadership potential, empowering positive behavior, and promoting healthy life decisions. Over the years, Kevin has regularly participated in campus events. For instance, the work of 1Nation Mentoring was featured as part of a Cultivating Community Connections event held by the Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research. We have continued to stay in contact and support each other's work as opportunities arise.

4. Christopher Tromp: Christopher attended Pittsburgh Creative and Performing Arts School (CAPA) and was a youth mentee of Leon. While attending Pittsburgh CAPA, Christopher joined TEENBLOC, a group of Pittsburgh Public School students from various backgrounds who work through creative outlets to amplify their voices, advocate, and empower themselves. Additionally, he was part of a group of young men who supported Leon's campaign for city council. When it was time for Christopher to apply to colleges, he considered attending Duquesne but decided that a local community college was a better fit.

5. Deanna Fracul: I came into this research as a married middle-aged white woman from a working-class family, a mother of three children, and an aspiring community engagement professional. While I was oriented toward antiracist beliefs and values, initially, I did not fully comprehend what being an ally or non-performative in my work meant in practical ways. However, I wanted to avoid being identified as a white savior, and that set me on a necessary and ongoing path toward the sort of conscious self-awareness one needs to effectively conduct qualitative research. Over the years, I have assumed multiple roles in this project, such as administrator, community organizer, co-facilitator, participant, learner, and, more recently, researcher. However, the position I valued the most from being a member of Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne is learner. While I have genuinely appreciated the enduring cooperative friendships we have built, I experienced the project as a sacred learning space that directly informed my research and practice. I was confronted weekly by my complicity in propping up racist systems and struggled to understand my most visceral feelings and emotions. While processing this experience, I did not want to burden anyone with educating me, so I

turned to the literature for diverse perspectives. The theoretical framework I laid out in the literature review represents my reflections, observations, and the progression of my thoughts and feelings. Additionally, that same literature helps to frame responses from the focus group participants and continues to be a touchstone for my community-engaged work today.

Procedures

This qualitative research project utilized modified appreciative inquiry questions. Emerging from organizational studies, appreciative inquiry is an asset-based approach to facilitating institutional change (Coghlan et al., 2003). The process begins with an analysis of the elements of an organization that are most effective and then considers how those positive attributes might be expanded. As Ashford and Parker explain, appreciative inquiry functions through a process of “discovery and valuing, envisioning, dialogue and co-constructing the future” (2001, p.4).

This case study began with an open-ended writing prompt followed by a focus group session. The data necessary to answer the research questions took the form of responses to several guided and probing questions based in appreciative inquiry. Additionally, the data were supplemented with a review of relevant documents and materials. More specifically, I had an archive of email correspondence and text messages with my community partner and co-facilitator, Leon Ford. Additionally, I had a record of meeting dates and events, brief personal reflections, post-session notes, and group writing prompts. These artifacts did not prove as useful as expected in supplementing the data collected from the open-ended writing prompt and focus group.

Data Collection

Data collection began with an open-ended writing prompt sent to the four participants prior to the focus group meeting. The writing prompt asked the participants to explain how Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne impacted them personally and to describe something that made it challenging to participate in the program. With this question, I was interested in responses that would contribute to an understanding of the personal impact of the initiative on the participants. Additionally, data were meant to be used to understand what prevented participants from attending or continuing with the initiative are particularly important. It should be noted that Kathy was the only participant to submit a written response to the prompt. She indicated the meetings being held in the evening as a barrier to her participation.

The subsequent focus group session included all four participants and lasted approximately one and a half hours. It began with a brief welcome followed by a modified appreciative inquiry prompt (see Appendix B) to, "Tell a story about when you felt particularly inspired by something you experience in the Voices Project." My expectation with this prompt was that it would serve to get people talking and would allow for probing questions. Next, with an eye on the program's educational impact, on all involved, I asked the question, "What was the most surprising thing you learned in this experience from others?" Following this prompt, I asked participants to, "Talk about a time when you felt particularly connected to other members of the group." This question was intended to yield responses that addressed the interaction and social cohesion that resulted from the engagement. In the group context, there was an opportunity for participants to engage in a back-and-forth conversation and prompted new

responses. The focus group session was conducted, recorded, and transcribed using the Zoom platform.

Borrowing from Theoharis (2007), I also employed autoethnographic elements in this study and considered my own experiences with the Voices Project in the analysis to fill in the gaps. Autoethnography was appropriate in this context for two reasons. First, as someone who played a role in bringing the program to campus, as well as co-facilitating and participating in the meetings, I have a unique perspective on the experience. Second, as noted in the literature review, the most meaningful community engagement projects entail reflection on individual experiences. So, discounting my own experiences would be counter to the best spirit of community engagement.

Instruments

The following instruments are included in the appendices. All of the instruments were created by the researcher.

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Method of Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was conducted from a positioned-subject approach (Conrad, Haworth, and Millar, 2001), where I assumed that the participants in the program actively interpreted and constructed meaning from their experiences as a part of the initiative. This allowed for the recognition of various perspectives to understand their experiences through democratic community engagement and a social justice lens. I used a grounded theory methodology where the open-ended writing prompt response and focus group transcripts were reviewed for emerging themes (Charmaz, 2014; Glazner and

Stauss, 1967). Analytic memos were utilized to understand the unique elements of the encounters that impacted personal and professional practice and facilitated a sense of community that led to both individual learning as well as barriers to participation. As the importance of specific themes began to emerge, the data were recoded to determine what factors were most significant.

Chapter 4: Description of Findings

Introduction

This dissertation focuses on identifying essential characteristics of initiatives that build cooperative relationships and solidarity to advance democratically engaged community-campus partnerships. As such, it involves understanding the conditions that undermine these relationships, the critical practices that strengthen them, and the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them. Fundamentally, this research is interested in identifying what worked and what did not within Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne University, an after-school mentoring program that evolved into a community-engaged writing initiative and dialogic space.

A focus group of four Voices Project participants was facilitated by the author, herself a participant, to elicit data on essential elements and practices within the program. It should be noted that, during the focus group, Leon contacted two other participants in the Voices Project, Khalil Darden and Jamaal Scott, who quickly joined the conversation and consented to being recorded. Khalil Darden attended Penn Hills High School and was a youth mentee of Leon. Notably, Khalil started the first Black Student Union at his high school. In 2017, he founded the Young Black Motivated Kings & Queens (YBMKQ). This community-based organization aims to give Pittsburgh's youth the tools, resources, and support they need to shape them into tomorrow's leaders. In addition, Khalil has become a prominent local activist, leading youth protests in response to police violence against young black men. In particular, he helped to organize a series of protests in response to his close friend Antwon Rose being killed by an East Pittsburgh police officer. Kahlil will soon graduate from Clark Atlanta University with a degree in

Business Administration with a dual concentration in Marketing and Management as well as a minor in Political Science. Jamaal Scott is a longtime friend and supporter of Leon from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Jamaal is a remarkable poet who shared his work during two Voices Project meetings. In fact, Leon and I later invited Jamaal to submit his poetry to be published in our special issue of *Kalfou*. Additionally, Jamaal attended an Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program conference with Leon and at the invitation of my husband, Norman. He also helped to organize and participated in the virtual poetry workshop with Kathy and her students. Leon invited both into the Zoom meeting because they were central to the participants' stories about their own experiences. Moreover, it contributed to a sense that the focus group was a reunion of key program participants.

A transcript of the focus group meeting was generated through the Zoom platform and analyzed from a grounded theory perspective (Charmez, 2014; Glass & Strauss, 1967). During a preliminary round of coding, analytic memos were utilized to identify emerging themes in the data. One of the most prominent themes to emerge from this coding was the importance of the space created during individuals' experiences in the Voices Project.

Additional rounds of coding were conducted to understand the nuances and types of space the participants were discussing. Eventually, it became clear that there was the establishment of a transformative space on Duquesne University's campus that transcended racial/geographic boundaries. That space was delineated as a place where participants could express vulnerability. In turn, embracing vulnerability created a familial-like bond that emboldened participants, led to social action beyond the group

context, and resulted in enduring collaborations on significant educational and community-based issues.

Border Crossing and Boundary Spanning

One of the first themes to emerge from the data analysis was the importance of crossing borders and spanning boundaries. Leon opens a discussion of this element in the following:

I felt inspired to share and in many different ways sharing changed my life. I mean we're all from Pittsburgh, so we know Pittsburgh is a very Black and white City and usually we don't mix. Especially, with younger people coming from the hood. So, that opportunity, the first time we came to Duquesne University, Deanna didn't want to overstep boundaries, but she wanted to create a space for us and then we went from the library in East Liberty [a historically Black neighborhood] to coming to this university and having white people in our space. Before we were just like a whole bunch of young men and a few professors and then it was a mixed group of young black men and women, but we still were able to maintain the integrity in sharing and the transparency and authenticity for the Voices Project. Then we're on campus and there are a whole lot of different people.

As Adams (2010) points out, Leon likely started this iteration of the Voices Project with the capabilities of a community boundary spanner, however the opportunity to put them to work in a university context was important for his personal and professional development. Above, he notes his lack of experience across racial divides, but he was still able to quickly comprehend multiple perspectives that could facilitate collaborative

planning for the future. In hindsight, his actions led me to seek other partners who could be brought to the table to help students amplify their voices. Whether his aims were personal, community-focused, or both, it was clear that he understood his role as a boundary-spanner to be a resource broker, relationship builder, and community leader.

At another point, Kevin explained that despite living in the Hill District, a Pittsburgh neighborhood that borders on Duquesne's campus, he did not have much experience with the university:

One thing that really inspired me first off by me just stay'n in the Hill, Duquesne is just so close, but I had never really had the opportunity to just sit on the campus. I would roll past, I had the opportunity to go to sporting events, but to actually be able to go into the university and sit in the campus, it was kind of with a different. It inspired me because I not only saw people being committed to having conversation, but Leon had different walks of life there and I think that showed me that although Pittsburgh is a Black and white city—I'm from Charlotte, so to me I'm used to seeing, like all kinds of people—but for me to see people really cross those bridges and come to Duquesne from different walks of life, it just showed me what you can do just by being intentional.

In this response, Kevin highlighted the importance of Leon's work as a boundary spanner who chooses to bring people along with him. While Kevin noted that he had previously been to some sporting events on campus, the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with a genuinely diverse group was impactful for him. In this, Kevin is describing his entry into uncharted territory (Keith 2015) and its impact on his sense of self as well as his relationships with others. Moreover, when he discusses what he

learned from the experience about the value of being intentional, it seems like this is a characteristic that could be especially important in his current work mentoring young Black men.

Chris echoes a similar sentiment as he describes what it was like for him, a Black high school student, to be welcomed onto a college campus:

I could say that it was inspiring just seeing all those different walks of life, all the different people we got to meet, even just talking to people sitting waiting, waiting on the campus in the library or at the Starbucks and just being able to see how a college campus operated. All the people I got to meet it was just to have that space. It was truly a once in a lifetime space, and to be able to be there.

While Kevin was an adult with a career, as one of Leon's mentees, Chris was similarly experiencing the value of being welcomed into uncharted space. However, as a young person, it was likely to have an even more meaningful impact on his future and likely contributed to the fact that he attended community college.

As a faculty member positioned within the university, Kathy was likely to have a different perspective on the interactions. However, in the following statement, she noted that the graciousness of the experience equally struck her in much the same way as Kevin and Chris:

One of the things that was inspiring to me was the warmth and the kindness that I experienced when I first met everyone. I remember arriving, and I think Leon said something like, "Everybody give everyone a hug," or something like that. And so being greeted with the hug and welcomed into this space was really nice for me. And also, I think it's important for academics to get involved in these important

conversations that are relevant beyond the Duquesne campus. So, I thought it was a real blessing to be invited into this space on campus and to have the opportunity to participate in this dialogue.

Here, Kathy discusses her very first interaction within the Voices Project. Obviously, campus meetings rarely begin with hugs, so she was struck by the radical hospitality we were attempting to cultivate. As is often the case with Leon, this was a spontaneous decision made authentically and without calculating the potential for reciprocity. As Kearney and Fitzpatrick (2021) point out, if “radical hospitality occurs beyond the walls of economic calculation,” it can also challenge our beliefs around reciprocity and mutuality in community-campus partnerships. The more significant point is that when developing partnerships to address larger social issues, the starting point should be prioritizing authentic hospitality rather than focusing our attention on calculated exchanges of university and community resources.

Additionally, as community members are being welcomed onto campus, Kathy is engaged in her border crossing experience. Above, she acknowledges that bringing different narratives into the university is essential for expanding upon the limits of how faculty understand the incredibly diverse communities and complex issues beyond their experiences. These boundary spanning encounters are centering community voices to bridge the expanses between how faculty comprehend the world around them and how it is experienced by those living there.

Later, Chris discusses the value that he was able to find in moving across what would have otherwise been effectively impermeable boundaries and getting to know people on the other side:

What was surprising to me was learning everyone's backgrounds and their different stories and—just like Jamal said—their way of thinking and how they approach things. And it made me realize that not everybody thinks the same, that everybody sees the world in their own way somehow, and they go about different things they see things differently and they might not understand unless, sometimes you have to really put it in context for them. Which is so surprising. I remember learning how the one girl she, was she was talking about how everyone was able to grow up and no one ever died, other than in car crashes or different things like that and when we were dealing with death in so many different ways.

This is a highly profound statement, made even more significant when you remember that he is explaining an exchange during the Voices Project that would have substantially impacted our campus partners.

It was likely that for many of the students and faculty in attendance, this was their first time hearing a story like this directly from someone who has experienced the impact of murders in his community. The opportunity to understand that the world is other than you have understood it and confronting the harmful effects of your belief system is an integral part of building cultural competencies and reflects much of what Taylor (2015) had to say about listening that is informed by the pedagogy of discomfort. In these interactions, students can begin to examine their positionality in relation to others critically, explore why encounters with difference destabilize them, recognize social injustices, and ultimately feel compelled to take action for social change by challenging dominant values and beliefs as well as counteracting dominant discourse.

Finally, in terms of border crossing and boundary spanning, Leon discusses the Voices Project as his first experience with white people who were actively engaged in challenging systemic racism, the category of people who are often referred to as “allies”. He explained:

You know, in the world of activism there is often the conversation about white allies, and I got to experience that personally, not only what white allies were, but you all became my family. You know what I mean? That was super surprising for me. Again, coming from Pittsburgh, where I grew up in an environment where I didn't have any white friends and things like that and then my story was very controversial. You know what I'm saying?

Earlier, Leon discussed his somewhat limited experiences with white people in general, so it is not surprising that he would have come to the Voices Project without knowing white people who were actively working to confront systemic racism. Clearly, this occurred at a stage in Leon’s journey before he had the widespread love and support he receives from people across so many social categorizations. Above, he’s making the point that, as a result, it opened him up to the potential that he could have in working as a boundary spanner.

Safe Space to Brave Space

The second theme to emerge from the data analysis related to our transition in thinking from safe space to a brave space. In the following, Kathy explains a critical lesson she was able to learn from Leon:

So, I was glad to be able to get involved as a faculty member and then, there's so many other things I can say, but I'll just end with this, I was obviously inspired by

Leon and his willingness to be vulnerable and his desire to inspire and empower others based on his experience and that made him a role model for me. So, I appreciated that.

Later, Leon described how vulnerability was centered in his developing practice:

Yeah, to follow up on that, my grandad spoke at my ten-year anniversary, and you know he was going over the many different life blessings that he taught me and something that I forgot about—that I live daily—that he was always serious about as a veteran, he always said, “Be about what you talk about. And practice what you preach. And if you don't, I can't respect you.” He just says it blunt just like that. My philosophy is that I want people to be vulnerable because I see being vulnerable as a pathway to open up that door.

So, oftentimes as leaders, we can get caught up and as teachers—as educators—we can get caught up in the lessons that we learn and teaching the lesson, but the best way to teach is by just applying what you want to teach to your life and being that example. I think in many spaces we don't consider that. We don't consider how powerful being an example is. Deanna, I think it was you or, maybe Norm, who sent me a video years ago about the first follower. It is about how sometimes when people do something first they're not the one who leads the way. It's usually the first follower.

I believe that the Voices Project was just creating a space where people could be vulnerable, where people felt safe and protected, but then it was you all who decided to lean in and share and I don't take that for granted. I don't take the trust for granted. You know, I can picture the room and a lot of the time, before

people spoke they would look at me and to see if it was okay to speak their truth. Again, I didn't take that for granted, and I recognize the value of being vulnerable in that space and how it helps other people to be vulnerable.

When Leon speaks about facilitating vulnerability, he explains that the fear that accompanied that vulnerability among our community partners was assuaged both by his willingness to set an example and the folks from the community being able to look to him for assurance that it was safe for them to do so. Once participants established a sense of security in the setting, they could gradually, and at their own pace, move into more courageous conversations.

As Garrison (1996) points out, we are always at risk in a complicated and ever-changing world, so embracing vulnerability may be the best response. Additionally, because of systemic racism, people of color are always at even greater risk within that racist system. Arow and Clemens (2013) note that given these circumstances, it is essential to move from the concept of safe space into one of brave space to change mindsets as we enter into difficult conversations. For them, a safe space is a setting that encourages students to honestly discuss controversial issues with sensitivity and respect for one another. Subsequently, when students experience an infringement of safe space ground rules, their negative responses often conflate a sense of safety with what is comfortable for them. Moreover, Taylor suggests that while students are engaged in dialogues across difference, emotions should be regarded as fundamental to learning and as “culturally and politically invested tools—and impediments—to learning about and across difference” rather than something to avoid (2016, p. 118).

Kevin also discussed vulnerability in one of his responses. His greater appreciation of vulnerability was tied to a serendipitous connection that emerged during one of the sessions:

One time where I really felt connected to all the work was, generally in our community, when people are vulnerable and open up it causes some people to shut down because they don't know what's coming. So, I think when I first was there and I was seeing everyone be vulnerable I didn't know how to take it, but me being adult in the space I had to try to be mindful and understand that I could only grow through being uncomfortable and getting to the end result. But me just opened up and building with Norm and him talking about the guys he was working with at “the Wall” when one of my guy’s dad—Robert Faruq Wideman—was actually at “the Wall” at the time. So, his action was able to make me feel more at ease and to really be able to build. So that was one thing that really came full circle for me.

Above, Kevin noted that challenging conversations can be especially difficult for adults. Still, because of his responsibility to set an example for the young men in the room, he had to push past his discomfort. In doing so, he gained common ground with Norm based on a connection to the father of one of his close friends, who was himself suffering a grave racial injustice. This fits with what Applebaum (2016) has written about white students demanding trust before speaking, while students of color can only develop trust when white students engage with them. In this instance, Norm discussing his work and friendship with Mr. Wideman was the sort of moment that established trust with Kevin.

In one of his responses, Chris explains that even beyond Leon and Kevin's role modeling, he was able to learn from his peers in this setting. He notes that:

Even seeing how the other boys were vulnerable, the ones who would act so cool like nothing ever got to them. Seeing them open up on a weekly basis and just learning from so many different people and how we all deal with growing up. How you can deal with it getting the different tools that we did, the different exercises. It was just a surprising and shocking thing.

Here, Chris is speaking to the almost infectious sense of freedom that openness to vulnerability facilitated within the program. This sense relates to Dewey's discussion of "cooperative friendship" (Waks 2011). Specifically, Chris is alluding to developing more communal relationships with the young men he had known coming into the project, which could then extend to the broader group and establish democratic solidarity.

In my response to this line of questioning, I discuss observing the courage of others and how that spread through the group and resulted in a reorientation or establishment of a brave space mindset:

So, there was a point, maybe around the third time we had met and Leon had brought Jamal—his friend that's a poet—and we had all been sitting in a circle, and Jamal was getting ready to share one of his pieces and he was really nervous, and he just was unsure about saying anything, and he turned and he looked at us, and he's like, "Are you sure this is a safe place to do this?" I just kind of paused and thought, "Of course, this is like, Yes, this is gonna be a safe place to do this." And I remember Leon, when we first met you were talking about creating a safe space and how important that was to you, but over time it became more about

being a brave space and I think that's something we accomplished together as a group over time.

Leon followed up on my response by saying:

Yeah, I agree. I remember that day because it was so powerful and his poem was super raw about white people, right and the Black experience in the U.S. and they were words that need to be needed to be said and needed to be heard. And I think that moment really set the tone. I think we already had good vibes, but I think that that was a day it really got deep. You know, the way he was received, and that encouraged him and inspired him to continue to share his work. Yeah, it was a very powerful moment.

In this, Leon points to the importance of authentic racial engagement and tarrying with the discomfort it produces (Yancy 2008). In doing so, white people are working to build the racial stamina necessary to be in the moment, cultivate self-awareness, and deepen our connection to others.

Later, I went on to share the following memory of Khalil choosing to be brave within the space we had established:

And another one that was important to me, I remember a professor from the School of Education had brought a group of her students to meet with us. There were maybe thirty people around the table that evening and they were all going to be teachers. Khalil got up and he read a letter about this hoodie policy that his school was instituting and he was speaking up against it. It was just a really powerful moment for me to hear him so confidently get up and read that and then to have all of those students, who were going to be going into the classroom, sort

of be put on the spot in that moment and say, “You know, what would you do if you were in this school, what would your reaction be?” And to have them start to answer honestly about that? That was really was a powerful moment for me.

In this instance Khalil was courageously using the skills that he had developed within the Voices Project to amplify his voice. Moreover, he built on my response with the following:

So, I mean that was actually crazy that that was your second one, because that was going to be mine. I was going to say when the Voices Project, it put me in a position to feel empowered and to know that I had the capability to speak against anything that was happening that I wanted to change. And knowing that I had the power to change it. Specifically, when the hoodie policy went into place my junior year of high school, the Voice Project was one of those things that inspired me to feel like I had a group of people that supported me in making this decision. I’m one of very few that spoke out against the policy to have it changed, but the Voices Project was that space for me was that space to know that if I needed support, if I needed people to fall back on, I had that group of people behind me.

This was an instance where Waks’ (2011) description of Dewey’s transactional-listening-in conversation occurred in that the collaborative conversation his letter spurred generated a new understanding among the group that then propelled Khalil into action. But, again, while this moment was important to both Khalil and me, I expect his honesty and the passion he conveyed was likely to have a significant impact on the future teachers in the room.

Generative Space

The third theme in the analysis was related to the ongoing relationships and work that emerged from experiences within the Voices Project. These responses were mainly elicited by the prompt to “Talk about a time when you felt particularly connected to other members of the group.” Generally, when people described what brought them close to the project, they chose to discuss what they got out of it. Often campus participants would ask to meet with me, a co-facilitator, to have coffee, debrief their experiences and discuss ideas for relevant projects beyond the meetings. Early on, I would encourage them to return to the project meetings to continue the dialogue and allow it to inform their understanding of the work they were considering. Additionally, as a result of requests from the young men, group activities began to develop organically outside of the bi-weekly meetings. These included on and off-campus events such as an appreciation dinner that the young men hosted for Leon, a field trip to listen to and meet Senator John Lewis when he was in town promoting his graphic novels, and an annual Black Love celebration on campus.

As a process, the additional activities that emerged from the Voices Project meetings tie back to Mitchell’s (2013) recognition that social justice is established through the behaviors, encounters, and relationships that make up community engagement.

Specifically, people committed to social justice must collectively identify and work toward a just definition of community while, at the same time, working to be just with each other and model relationships for a more just world. This type of social justice-oriented community engagement requires reciprocity in facilitating projects that respect the knowledge and abilities of everyone involved, cultivating authentic relationships where we can move from listening to understanding, and developing interpersonal

connections that extend beyond the boundaries of an engagement project and academic roles.

In my response to the prompt about feeling most connected to the other members of the group, I noted the following:

One of the times when I felt particularly connected to the other members of the group was when Khalil and Christopher asked us to help organize the appreciation dinner for Leon. This was like maybe their fourth or fifth visit to Duquesne, and I just wasn't sure, but they just kept insisting, "This is something we really want to do. We have to do this." So, we started planning, and that evening when we held the dinner, we had spent the day together decorating and preparing and I was really nervous because I didn't know what was going to happen. And it was it was such an emotional and just a positive thing to be with Leon's family and friends, and watch all of these young men pay tribute to him. I think it was the first time for me where I felt like I was really part of the Voices Project.

Kathy offers a similar example in the following:

I just wanted to say that I felt closest to the Voices Project when I experience what it led to in other spaces. So, for example, I met Leon and that led to him taking my class and I have to say, Leon, you basically co-taught that class with me. That's how I felt because you brought so much wisdom and insight and experience and vulnerability. I mean authentic vulnerability and all the students would wait for him to speak and listen to what he had to say. So, that was a wonderful connection that came out of the Voices Project for me. Also, Jamal shared his

poetry as part of this workshop that we were doing virtually at a senior center and we learned from—and we're inspired by—that poetry. So, I'm just grateful for the ways that things have come out of that project that I was able to learn from and I think my students also learn from some of these encounters. So, thank you.

In this, Kathy again expresses an appreciation for the vulnerability discussed earlier, noting that it had extended beyond the Voices Project into one of her courses where Leon was registered as a student while serving as a co-instructor. Later in her reflection, Kathy also discusses bringing Jamal into her poetry workshop. This comment is particularly important because while the workshop took place years after the project meetings had ended, Jamal's participation took her right back to the experience. This sentiment indicates the ongoing impact that the Voices Project is continuing to have on the people who took part in it.

Jamal also discusses the significance of his ongoing collaboration with Kathy when addressing the times he felt most connected to the members of the group:

I think the biggest point for me was when we were talking about how we were coping during the pandemic, because I think a lot of times people thought they were alone, dealing with certain things by themselves and just to come to find out everybody was kind of feeling the same, the same emotions, the same thought process. So, building off of that and then coming up with the right concept, I believe that helped me in a lot of ways, just knowing that I wasn't alone.

Above, Jamal explains that despite our meetings ending in the late Fall of 2017, he was able to find comfort in his collaborative work with Kathy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Leon makes a similar point about the power of collaborative efforts in his and others' ongoing work. He noted that:

Brother Jason spoke to this at my tenth-year anniversary, he was like, “Yo, in the beginning there wasn't this many people. You know we always loved Leon, like how you all love him now, but in the beginning, we didn't have this type of support.” You know what I mean? And he made that very clear. So, to have that that genuine support in the safe space that challenged me, right. Like those pushes to say, “Yo, you have the power to change what policing looks like in this city, but also the grace and the love,” when I was like, “Yo, I'm not, I don't want that—you know what I mean—and I don't want to carry this burden, I just want to be a regular person.” So, the many different spaces that were reserved for me from everybody involved in the Voices Project from me taking Kathy's class and the other courses I took at Duquesne, to just personally the conversations that I have had with you know you and Norm and Deanna and brother Kevin and Khalil. I think the Voices Project is just like a family, you know what I mean.

That really surprised me because it started from little Dorian's mom saying, “Yo. Little Dorian is cutting up in school.” And little Dorian got Chris and a bunch of other friends, and it was just me, but then it turned into like a real community, where you know every person, within the Voices Project, we were able to lean on other people personally and professionally. I think there are many different ways that we can speak about those personal moments of reflection, of doubt, and the many different feelings that one may feel in leadership to those professional connections. That really surprised me and shocked me. And to see

where all of us are now, like with the HEAR Foundation or YBMKQ it was a wonderful journey, and it shows the significance of true community engagement and collaboration with the university and members of the community.

The actions he remembers above make Leon an exemplar of the socially just engagement that Mitchell (2014) describes. His mentoring efforts began with a mother in his community coming to him for help with her son. Given his experience in the local public school system, Leon understood the potential consequences that might await a young Black man beginning to face disciplinary measures. His efforts with this young man and others brought them to campus, where they were impacted by and made an impact on an academic setting and the people participating in it. Moreover, in his response, he recognizes that this impact continues to be felt and drawn from even today.

Feeling moved after listening to Leon give the response above, I offered the following:

So, I'm gonna feed off of that a little bit, because I wrote down earlier "the power of cooperative friendship". So, in a lot of my writing, I started writing about democratic listening because that was the thing that I could find that most closely represented what I experienced in the Voices Project with this group. Everybody's listening and taking turns, talking and really feeding off of each other, but then I came to learn about cooperative friendship and it seems really simple, but it's the thing that sticks with me the most. Leon's right, we became a family really quickly. We bonded really quickly and I think that carries through even today. If I see Kevin somewhere. Kathy and I have coffee online all the time and I value all

of these things so much like seeing Christopher's mom, and just getting to hug her. Just being able to help Khalil with things that he's still working on.

It's not something that's ever stopped for me, and it's really laid the foundation, because when I started working on bringing the Voices Project to Duquesne with Leon, I was really new to community engagement, and I was terrified. I really didn't know what I was doing and Leon's like, "Deanna, don't worry it's gonna be awesome. It's gonna be great. It's gonna be good." Just kind of all that and just kind of letting it happen, and how that's really informed everything that I do since and how I try to be in any type of collaboration. I hope that has reflected in the way that we've all worked together since, because I've done the ACH Clear Pathways summer camp with Kathy. I never thought that I would be able to replicate this experience again, but it's possible when I work with all of you.

In this response, I am not only talking about cooperative friendship and democratic listening but also acknowledging the familial sentiment and ongoing impact that the project has had on my career. Like Chris, I believed this was a once-in-a-lifetime space, but now I understand that our collaboration has taken on a life of its own, and its reach extends well beyond this project. More importantly, we have carried forward what we learned in that space.

Kevin echoed the response about collaboration in the spirit of what we were attempting to accomplish in the Voices Project, keeping the project alive for him:

I definitely agree with everything everyone said about the power collaboration. I've also thought, I think the power of passion. Oftentimes, it's really about what

group you're a part of or the people that you are around. But this really showed me that if you put people with the right passions together, they can really create a space for other people to feel safe to talk about what's going on. And actually, through a way. like Jamaal said, that actually listen to move past it. And I think that kind of what that showed me. It's not just who's in the room, but is it the right emotional setting for what we're trying to talk about. And I think that's one thing that we would be able to see and understand through the Voice of Project.

I think that was important to me, because it just since then we've got opportunity to keep coming and being involved in Duquesne. Thank you, Deanna, just everything that you've done and all the opportunity provided for, but me, just seeing it allowed me to also bring it to real life for the young kids who I work with. So, I was blessed to be inspired, because now I build it into the work that we do every day.

With this statement, Kevin, like many of us, highlights ongoing collaboration as a key element of the program. He is also drawing attention to the importance of listening and establishing the right emotional setting that allows people to move through difficult conversations, share their passions, and work together to accomplish shared goals. More importantly, at the end of his response, he points out that what he learned in the Voices Project has become something essential that he builds into his work daily.

In the following, Chris reflects on his gratitude for the enduring connections that he has been able to maintain with the people he met through the Voices Project:

I wanted to say thank you. You know it was, to be honest, it's still amazing how I still see different people all the time. I've seen Mr. Kevin multiple places. I've seen

multiple people, I've seen everybody different times. So, it's always love and it's like a family that that we've become over the years. So, thank you for opening up and letting us be able to do that at Duquesne and pushing us and fighting for us and all the things that you are willing to do.

Khalil expresses a similar gratitude in the following:

One of the things for me, like Kathy, I got to appreciate the Voices Project after it happened because of the connections that stayed intact after the project. To still know I can call people like Deanna and Norm and pick up the phone any day and say, "Hey, this is what I need" or just what I'm working on and "I need your support." I'm most grateful for that, the experience to be able to still call upon people who I met in this space in the space of vulnerability. We may not still be gathering in this space the same, but to know that we can, if we needed to create the space again, we could.

Perhaps what is most significant in his response, is not only a sense that the Voices Project is still alive in us, but we could actually reconvene and recreate it.

One of the most surprising results of this analysis was the impact that convening the Voices Project@Duquesne had on Leon himself. While he has been hailed locally and now worldwide as an exemplar of a leader who has turned a tragedy into triumph, Leon discusses how this project has shaped his ongoing efforts:

And you know, I remember pushes, especially from Norm to kind of think about embracing police officers, which you know there were moments with, in the beginning, where I was open to it and other moments where I gave like, push back and real moments of tears and internal challenges, and I was still fighting the

city. I think about how those moments were the seed that was planted inside of me that grew into the HEAR Foundation. And it's interesting like, you know, when we were thinking about names for the foundation, someone suggested the "HEAR Foundation" and she had no idea about the Voices Project. It's interesting how the names are connected and that that was it was a coincidence, but you know it was really more like serendipity.

Whether it was the seeds planted or a ripple effect of the Voices Project@Duquesne, the personal growth that occurred was not limited to the young men being mentored or the campus and community partners. It also fed back to Leon himself and has allowed him to deepen and expand his work in the community and well beyond.

Educational Space

The final theme that emerged from the analysis related directly to the importance of the Voices Project as an educational space for the young men that Leon was mentoring. While this could be almost taken for granted and widely reflected in their responses discussed earlier, it is important to remember education and mentorship were the primary drivers of the project. Chris noted this in the following:

We looked forward to something every week. Like, we were constantly talking about, "Hey, we got this coming and we're getting to do this, or all those different people that we're getting to meet, which is always something new, and it was something that added and inspired us even though we were going every week it just gave us something that, I don't, I didn't think that was ever something I would be a part of just as a group growing up. You just never see, it was just a something new and it it's brought so much different, guidance, knowledge,

wisdom. Just being able to, us writing our thoughts down every week. Us challenging each other. I can say it's inspired me in so many different ways and so many different things.

I was gonna add that the there was a day that I remember, we were all writing down our goals and what we seen for our future. Before that day I have never had done anything like that. So, that day, just sharing those different things, seeing the goals of my peers and just talking to them on a deeper level that day. That was the day where I felt super connected, I felt connected to everybody and the things that other people wanted to do. I remember when, Khalil would do his talent show, helping out with that and all those different things, it was those the times where I felt the most connected to everybody.

In this response, Chris discusses the value of sharing his thoughts and feelings through writing as well as how that encouraged the young men to challenge each other and inspired them to think about the future. As Chandler (2002) explains, this is an example of how time spent writing together results in the development of self-esteem, self-efficacy, social support, and cultural connection.

Ginwright et al. (2005) encourages policymakers to focus on opportunities for urban youth to participate in the democratic process. They note that urban youth tend to actively resist reform efforts imposed on them because they are excluded from conversations about their communities that inform those efforts. From our experiences in the Voices Project, it is clear opportunities to share their lived experience can serve as a launching pad for participation in the democratic process and the development of their

civic identity. For example, multiple youth participants in the Voices Project became involved in Black student unions and the process of advocating for their peers.

Additionally, Warren et al. (2009) defines social capital as a resource that solidifies the relationships between people, allowing them to act together to achieve common goals. Khalil's story from the previous section about his resistance to the dress code policy is an important example of the social capital generated within the project. According to Khalil, his relationships with the other group members helped facilitate the civic engagement called for by Ginwright et al. (2005

Summary of Analysis

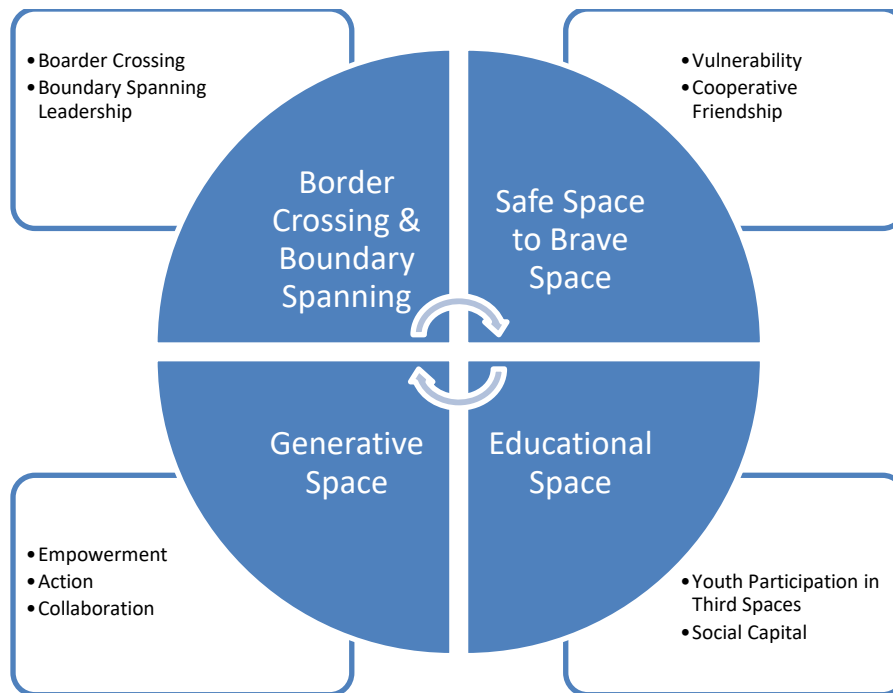
This analysis was focused on identifying the conditions that affect cooperative relationships and solidarity in democratically engaged community-campus partnerships. It sought to understand the critical practices that strengthen these elements, the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them, and how they might be undermined. Specifically, the central research question and subordinate inquiry were:

Primary Question: What aspects of the program did the participants find most personally and professionally impactful?

Secondary Question: How did a sense of community within the experience contribute to participants learning?

Tertiary Question: What barriers to participation and engagement did participants experience?

Figure 1. Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne Pilot Focus Group Emergent Themes



In the analysis, four themes emerged, were discussed above, and are summarized below in Figure 1. They include the importance of the Voices Project as an instance of border crossing and boundary spanning where three essential types of dialogic space were established. These include a shift from safe space to brave space, generative space, and educational space.

The analysis showed that participants found the vulnerability and resultant empathy shared to be most personally and professionally impactful. These sentiments contributed to a sense of community within the experience and allowed for difficult conversations requiring deep listening that spurred individual and collective action within and beyond the group. However, since the participants, with the exception of Kathy, did not answer the written questions, there needed to be more data on barriers to participation. Her response noted timing and other commitments as barriers, while it is understood that the stress of Leon’s civil trial prevented him from continuing with the

project. At the same time, the young men were moving into the initial phases of their adult lives and developing their community initiatives.

Chapter 5: Recommended Actions

Discussion of Findings

This dissertation focuses on identifying essential characteristics of initiatives that build cooperative relationships and solidarity to advance democratically engaged community-campus partnerships. As such, it involves understanding the conditions that undermine these relationships, the critical practices that strengthen them, and the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them. Fundamentally, this research has been interested in understanding what worked and what did not within Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne University, an after-school mentoring program that evolved into a community-engaged writing initiative and dialogic space.

Specifically, the findings of this pilot focus group revealed that participants' vulnerability and the resultant empathy were powerful and important to their personal and professional development. In particular, the shared vulnerability contributed to a sense of community essential for facilitating democratic listening within difficult conversations. As a result of this deeper level of listening, participants were moved toward individual and collective action within and beyond the group.

Contribution to the Field of Educational Leadership

This research aimed to garner ideas from and identify specific features of Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne to inform the design of future campus-community initiatives. In addition, the intention was to understand how the project could be improved while offering a novel theoretical framework for campus-community partnerships. Primarily, it has been influenced by Saltmarsh et al.'s (2009) notion of democratic engagement as an alternative to civic engagement in higher education,

Dostilio's (2014) roles and processes of democratically engaged community-university partnerships, Morton and Bergbauer's (2015) theory of community, Saltmarsh et al.'s (2015) model for transformative institutional initiatives that are inherently democratic, and Mitchell's (2017) intersectional approaches to community engagement.

Perhaps, the most noteworthy contribution to the field of higher education leadership offered here is a recognition, similar to Morton and Bergbauer's (2015), that radical hospitality, vulnerability, and democratic listening are essential for building authentic relationships and finding common ground across social boundaries. Moreover, a unique element of this study is that while most of the extant research focuses on instances where the partnership projects take place in the community, this project took place on Duquesne's campus. In many ways, Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne functioned to minimize the boundary between our university and community. By leveraging university resources and extending an invitation to our partners beyond the traditional campus or sporting event, various rooms across Duquesne's campus became shared spaces where community knowledge was honored, their voices were prioritized, and community assets could begin to be leveraged for social change. Moreover, these types of projects can play an essential role in establishing a larger sense of trust toward the university and reinforce our Spiritan mission in the community. It is important to note that an enduring trust was built through this project, and even though the project eventually ended, the cooperative friendships remain intact.

Recommendations and Implications for Social Justice in Educational Leadership

Based on this research, the initial focus of building democratically engaged community university partnerships should be cultivating authentic relationships across

diverse groups of people, allowing room for cooperative friendships to form. Only then can we begin to explore our intersecting identities, take into account the complexities of our lived experiences, and scratch the surface of addressing social problems.

Additionally, we need to create more opportunities on our campuses where community knowledge, assets, and voices are prioritized. I also recommend embedding multiple mentors from the community and university within similar projects for sustainability purposes. Furthermore, leveraging university resources in support of partners can extend far beyond the economic resources we usually think of when planning such experiences (i.e., connections, disciplinary knowledge, space, and equipment). From a social justice perspective, leaders should be prepared to deal with institutional barriers related to working with minors on campus. Specifically, the workload for seeking permissions and authorization for youth programs is substantial. Finally, practitioners must be aware of practical transportation issues, as with any after-school program.

Limitations

Since this was an initial pilot study, one of the study's limitations was the size and scope of the sample. During the project, we had dozens of participants attend our meetings from various social and economic backgrounds that are not reflected in the data gathered. Initially, this focus group was designed to include four Black participants and myself, a white woman. Primarily, the study participants were Black men, three who participated in the program as mentors and two who participated as high school students. While their contribution to the work is profound, as of yet, there is no data on how participation in the project impacted white faculty and university students. Including

Kathy was important because she could share what the experience meant to a Black female faculty member at a predominantly white university.

Another potential bias is that I maintained multiple roles as a co-facilitator of the project as well as a researcher and focus group member. As a result, participants may have been biased in their responses. However, my participation may also have contributed to the ongoing sense of commitment to the project.

Implications for Leadership and Growth Agenda

When I started working with Leon, I was a graduate assistant at the Center for CETR, and today I am a full-time employee managing faculty development and community partnerships. Early in my career, I learned the importance of positioning relationship building at the center of my practice from my colleagues, which this project confirmed and reinforced. More specifically, my experience in this project affirmed my appreciation for the Spiritan ethos in my efforts to build community-campus partnerships because it is founded particularly on cultivating relationships, working with those on the margins, and being open to the spirit. My meeting and working with a young Black man who was shot and paralyzed by a police officer, along with the young men he mentors and the community members he brought to this project, was an experience on the margins beyond anything I had encountered. Since then, I have incorporated what I have learned from this project into my daily efforts to further my understanding as a scholarly practitioner working towards social change. Moving forward, I want to maintain and build on what I have learned from this experience paying particular attention to this ethos of community partnership development.

Given the feedback from my committee members, I would like to explore the concept of an autoethnographic literature review based on my transformation as a participant in this project. Primarily, it interests me because I only realized that I was using the literature review as a reflective tool once I started to review the focus group data and was unsure about how to make meaning from their responses in an appropriately reflexive way. Additionally, producing an article about autoethnographic literature review has great potential to inform the research practices of scholarly practitioners within the field of educational leadership and beyond.

Finally, after my dissertation defense, Leon expressed interest in strategizing to create a Voice Project 2.0. He suggested that the Hear Foundation could provide access to funding and become a resource for student participants as well as mentors. The robust positive findings from this study will inform the development of the Voices Project 2.0. I enthusiastically look forward to continuing our work together. Additionally, I intend to explore further the concept and function of insubordinate spaces and accompaniment in campus-community partnerships.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Consent Form

I am asking you to participate in a research study titled “Public Good and Common Ground: Writing Democratic Engagement In Campus-Community Partnerships”. I will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. This study is being led by Deanna Fracul, Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership at Duquesne University. The Faculty Advisor for this study is Dr. Rick McCown, School of Education at Duquesne University.

What the study is about

The purpose of this study is to identify essential characteristics of initiatives that build cooperative relationships and solidarity to advance democratically engaged community-campus partnerships. As such, it involves understanding the conditions that undermine these relationships, the critical practices that strengthen them, and the role of community engagement professionals in facilitating them. Fundamentally, this research is interested in understanding what worked and did not within Leon Ford's Voices Project@Duquesne University, an after-school mentoring program that evolved into a community-engaged writing initiative and dialogic space.

What we will ask you to do

I will ask you to describe how participation in this program impacted your personal and professional practices, how a sense of community within the program contributed to your learning, and if there were any barriers to your participation and engagement.

Risks and discomforts

I do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research.

Benefits

Participation in this study may lead to a better understanding of yourself and your experience in the program. Additionally, the information from this study may benefit the practice of community-engagement between universities and their surrounding populations.

Incentives for participation

There will be no financial compensation for participation in this research project.

Audio/Video Recording

A focus group session will be conducted on the Zoom platform which can be accessed via personal computer or smart phone. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Upon the completion of this research project videos will be deleted and the transcripts will be destroyed.

Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview video recorded.

- I do not want to have this interview recorded.
 I am willing to have this interview recorded:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Privacy/Confidentiality/Data Security

The data collected for this study will include the names of each participant. Data will be kept secure on a private home computer. Only the primary investigator, Deanna Fracul, will have access to this data.

Taking part is voluntary

Participation in this study is voluntary, participants may refuse to participate or discontinue at any time or refuse to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is *Deanna Fracul*, a *graduate student* at Duquesne University. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Deanna Fracul at fraculd@duq.edu or at 412/535-3176. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants at 412/396-6326 or access their website at <https://www.duq.edu/research/research-conduct/human-subjects---irb> .

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information, and I have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for five years beyond the end of the study.

Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol

Duration: 120 minutes

Platform: Recorded via Zoom

Guiding Prompts

The focus group moderator will use the following prompts as a guide.

- 1) Tell a story about when you felt particularly inspired by something you experience in the Voices Project.
- 2) What was the most surprising thing you learned in this experience from others?
- 3) Talk about a time when you felt particularly connected to other members of the group.

Note: I expect that probing questions will emerge as I listen to respondents.