Winter In America
Exploring Epistemologies Of Youth Activism In The 21st Century

BY
ASIF WILSON
B.A., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008
M.Ed., University of Illinois at Chicago, 2010

THESIS
Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Chicago, 2018

Chicago, Illinois

Defense Committee:
Eric Gutstein, Chair and Advisor
Maria Varelas, Curriculum and Instruction
David Stovall, Education Policy Studies
Daniel Morales-Doyle, Curriculum and Instruction
K. Wayne Yang, University of California, San Diego
This dissertation is dedicated to the Fellows and to all the freedom fighters that have come before me and that will follow me. They give me love, light, and the energy to do this work.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the participants of this study for committing countless hours of conversation, providing me with feedback and expertise. While their names are not included in the author credits of this dissertation, their contributions were endless.

I would especially like to thank and acknowledge my chair and advisor, Rico Gutstein, who spent countless hours working with me to prepare this dissertation. I am grateful for his support. I would also like to acknowledge my committee members K. Wayne Yang, David Stovall, Maria Varelas, Nicole Nyugen, and Danny Morales-Doyle. Their wisdom, support, and feedback helped guide me along the way.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family, friends, and partner. They provided support, community, and the drive to complete the final requirements required to receive a Ph.D. This work required me to spend a great deal of time in solitude away from the people I value most in life. I look forward to spending more time with them.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction** .......................................................................................................................... 1  
  Sunday mornin’ activism ........................................................................................................ 1  
  Context of 21st century activism .......................................................................................... 3  
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................... 8  
  Terms of this dissertation ...................................................................................................... 11  

**Chapter 2** — Theoretical Framework: A review of the literature on popular education, agency, critical race theory, and healing ................................................................. 12  
  Popular Education .................................................................................................................. 13  
  Agency .................................................................................................................................. 17  
  Critical Race Theory (CRT) ................................................................................................. 24  
  Healing ................................................................................................................................. 27  
  Popular education, agency, Critical Race Theory, and healing: Their inter-relatedness and how they fit within this research proposal? ......................................................... 31  

**Chapter 3** — Methods ............................................................................................................. 36  
  Greenhouse Fellowship: A contextual and methodological description of the case .......................................................... 37  
  Asif: Insider/Outsider ............................................................................................................. 45  
  Data Sources ........................................................................................................................ 49  
  Archival documents .................................................................................................................. 49  
  Fellow-Created Documents .................................................................................................. 50  
  Process Documents ................................................................................................................. 55  
  Public Documents .................................................................................................................. 57  
  Follow-up interviews with Meghan ....................................................................................... 58  
  Data Analysis ........................................................................................................................ 59  
  Coding ................................................................................................................................... 60  
  Analysis of the coded data ...................................................................................................... 62  
  Validity, Reliability, and Ethics ............................................................................................ 65  
  Generalizability ..................................................................................................................... 68  

**Chapter 4** — The limits and pathways to agency in East Chicago: An exploration of contours ................................................................................................................................. 71  
  What are contours? ................................................................................................................. 71  
  Characteristics of the contours .............................................................................................. 72  
  Contours represent the local landscapes that shape places and spaces.................. 72  
  Contours are shaped by the visible and invisible boundaries of the world we live in .................................................................................................................................................. 73  
  Contours enable and constrain agency .............................................................................. 73  
  People can change contours through praxis ....................................................................... 73  
  An exploration of the historical contours of East Chicago ......................................... 75  
  The Fellowship: Reviving what used to be ............................................................... 91  
  Defining the contours: How did the Fellows make sense of the limit situations in East Chicago? ....................................................................................................................... 91  
  Contours as malleable: redefining the structural boundaries through agency ........ 94  
  (Re)defining the contours through the praxis ................................................................. 94
Engaging in the dialect of the contours: what’s the relationship between structures and agency? ................................................................. 98
Conclusion ................................................................................................................. 102

Chapter 5 – Praxis of the educator: teaching and learning in popular education spaces ................................................................................ 105

Reflecting on my role as an educator ................................................................. 105
Critical hope: A process not a product ............................................................. 108

A Pedagogy of Risk: The role of the educator in a liberatory setting ............. 110
Pillar 1: Relationships ......................................................................................... 111
Pillar 2: Relevance .............................................................................................. 118
Pillar 3: Revolution .............................................................................................. 127
Pillar 4 and Pillar 5: Recognition and Responsiveness ..................................... 135
Pillar 6: Reflection ................................................................................................. 143

Summary: A pedagogy of risk ........................................................................... 148

The Interconnections of the Pillars .................................................................. 150

A pedagogy of risk is humanizing ..................................................................... 150
A pedagogy of risk is mindful of the needs of survival .................................. 152
A pedagogy of risk dismantles hierarchy through solidarity ......................... 153
A pedagogy of risk is connected to students’ lives ......................................... 156
A pedagogy of risk is painful ............................................................................ 157
A pedagogy of risk is complex ......................................................................... 159
A Pedagogy of Risk is praxis ............................................................................. 160

Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 161

Chapter 6—I ain’t no activist…well maybe I am .............................................. 166

Jaylah – I’m an activist…Wait, no I’m not…Wait, yes I am, just not yet .......... 170
Jaylah’s initial self-perceptions of agency ....................................................... 172
Transformational agency: By any means necessary .................................... 177

Summary: Jaylah’s shifting perceptions and relationship to agency .............. 181

Jj: Social Justice Praxis from the Jump ............................................................. 183
Jj’s Early Perceptions of activism: Early signs of praxis ................................. 186
Jj’s shifting analysis: “You never are done with your research” ................. 190
Transforming the system from within: Developing agency through work .... 193
Agency and healing: What’s love got to do with it? .................................... 197

Summary: Jj’s social justice praxis as a pathway to healing ......................... 202

Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 204

Chapter 7—Implications, limitations, open questions, and next steps ...... 208

Implications ......................................................................................................... 208
In this moment, youth and popular education contexts can be catalysts to a (re) writing of the world ............................................................ 208
Teaching is more than teaching. It is a political act grounded in praxis ...... 212
Research is praxis ............................................................................................... 213
Popular education needs structural support .................................................. 215

Limitations ......................................................................................................... 215
Research setting ................................................................................................. 216
Research participants ....................................................................................... 216
The use of archival data .................................................................................... 216
Time span of study ............................................................................................ 217
Individualizing activism ................................................................................... 217
EXPLORING EPISTEMOLOGIES OF YOUTH ACTIVISM

Researcher positionality............................................................................................................217

Open Questions..........................................................................................................................218
How does this work translate into school settings?.........................................................218
How do adults and youth do this work together? Long term?...............................218
Researcher identity..................................................................................................................219
Agency and healing................................................................................................................219

Next Steps..................................................................................................................................220
Follow up with the Fellows........................................................................................................220
Exploration of other contexts re-inventing Freire.............................................................220
Healing in and out of schools.................................................................................................220
Researcher as insider/outsider..............................................................................................221
Contours and agency............................................................................................................221

Closing Statement....................................................................................................................221

Cited Literature.........................................................................................................................223

APPENDICES............................................................................................................................236
Appendix A.................................................................................................................................236
Approved UIC IRB consent to participate.................................................................236
Appendix B.................................................................................................................................240
Interview Protocol (from quarterly Fellow Interviews)..................................................240
Appendix C.................................................................................................................................241
Daily Work Plan template.................................................................................................241
Appendix D.................................................................................................................................242
Guidelines for creating a newsletter entry.................................................................242

VITA.............................................................................................................................................243
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE FELLOWS</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Defining the concepts of resistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Archival data sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Fellow created documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Process documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Public documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Multiple source process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ethical considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Contours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>East Chicago is ___ artist statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>East Chicago is ___ exhibit installed at the East Chicago Fitness Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>A pedagogy of risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>The interconnections of a pedagogy of risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>A pedagogy of risk revisited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Jaylay’s agency development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Ecosystem of love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>JJ’s agency development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF ABREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRT</th>
<th>Critical Race Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CRP</td>
<td>Culturally Relevant Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMARY

This intrinsic and descriptive case study (Merriam, 1998) examined the relationship(s) between agency development in young people and Paulo Freire’s popular education approach, also called a *problem posing pedagogy*. For one year I served as executive director of an East Chicago, Indiana, non-profit organization, Greenhouse Fellowship. Greenhouse Fellowship was a full-time, paid, program for high school graduates that re-invented Freire’s (1970) problem posing pedagogy. Over the course of one-year, five Fellows, an associate director, and I (executive director) engaged in a critical investigation of the Fellows’ lived realities while also engaging in action to alter the conditions that they discovered. More specifically, this dissertation explored

- how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship made meaning of their lived realities using a *problem-posing pedagogy* (Freire, 1970);
- how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship negotiated their agentic identities in the real world—a real world that encourages them to democratically act within the system, not dismantle it; and
- how the adult-facilitators—both administrators and guests—in Greenhouse Fellowship created youth spaces of agency development and how they facilitated the process.

To investigate the research questions I organized, coded, and analyzed archival data (Fellow created, public, and organizational process documents) collected during the Fellowship (2014-2015) and transcriptions from three follow-up interviews with Meghan, the associate director.
SUMMARY

One major finding of this research is captured through the term contour, what I define as the localized converging points between structures of society and agency.

Contours, as described in this dissertation, are bound by the (a) structures of society, what Freire (1970) called “limit situations”, and the (b) praxis of people. The study of the contours, in all their functions, facilitated the Fellows’ move away from fatalism towards a recognition of their agency.

The second finding of this study related to the role of the educator in popular education settings. I came to understand that Meghan and I, as the adult facilitators at Greenhouse Fellowship, were engaging in a pedagogy of risk where relationships, relevant experiences, a revolutionary praxis, recognition and responding to social and emotional needs, and deep reflection were foundational pillars to teaching and learning experiences we developed in the Fellowship.

Finally, while the Fellowship had an impact on the Fellows’ emergent agentic (activist) identities, this dissertation demonstrates that each of them entered the Fellowship with agency from previous experiences. The Fellowship, as a site of popular education, served as a context that supported the Fellows, and the adults, agentic transformation through praxis.
Introduction

There is a restlessness within our souls that keeps us questioning, discovering and struggling against a system that will not allow us space and time for fresh expression…. I have many things to tell you about tomorrow’s light and love.

- Gill Scott Heron, Winter in America

Sunday mornin’ activism

One of the few memories I have from my childhood is Sunday morning, more like afternoon, breakfast with my mom and dad. Regardless of where we lived throughout the fourteen years of their marriage, I can vividly remember this weekend tradition. Maybe because it has had such an impact on my own agency cultivation, my analysis of the world, and ultimately, why I pursued this research endeavor.

Aside from the food there was the music. Given my father’s past career as a professional jazz musician he used every opportunity he could to infuse his life, and ours, with music. Every Sunday, he turned on the high-powered tower audio station that became popular in the 1980’s, pulled out his favorite vinyl records (at some point these 12 inch records were replaced by tapes and compact discs), and filled our entire house up with the sounds of Gil Scott-Heron, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Miles Davis, War, Santana, Sly and the Family Stone, and other great jazz, funk, and soul legends. These were not just records with musical notes and words, they were historical artifacts of pain, suffering, struggle, joy, and hope.

I turn to these early moments as markers in my life where my agency was cultivated. I was placed into situations, unknowingly at the time, where others around me
were questioning their worlds and their positionalities within them—situations where I gained pieces of the analytical framework through which I now view the world. In many ways, these musicians and my father influenced my identity with a sense of responsibility to live a life of praxis—reflection and action on the world. They were preparing me for a world of oppression, but beyond the fatalistic scope. The messaging in these records also gave me hope that a more just world could be created, and more so, that I could participate in its re-creation.

Before I move on to discuss the intentionality of this research query I want to acknowledge the dialectical relationship between resistance and oppression. We live in a world permeated by empire. Historically and indigenously, both sides—paternal and maternal—of me come from dispossessed peoples. Because of this dispossession, my life growing up was complicated. I say this because I want to acknowledge that conscientization (Freire, 1970) is not a clean, formulaic process. It is malleable, contextual, and full of contradictions. Because I am a historical product of imperialism, my path to becoming more human also becomes a path of de-colonization where I have had to/will continue to confront/shed my oppressive identities. I say all of this because although my Sunday morning experiences were a moment of agency cultivation they were also moments were patriarchy was centered. I can not once recall my mother speaking to me in Urdu—her native language—or playing her favorite music on Sundays. My identity as a Black man is in association to the dispossession of my Pakistani identity.

---

1 I use the term dispossessed, and not urban, to symbolize the centuries of cultural theft that youth of color, and their indigenous ancestors, experience(d). Education scholar Patrick Camangian (2013) writes “‘urban’ focuses on what communities of color do not have in the context of U.S. society while “dispossessed” acknowledges what has historically been stolen from Third World people worldwide” (p. 2).
The relationship between oppression and liberation should constantly be examined as we attempt to better understand how individual and collective agency is developed, how this development is facilitated, and how it is acted upon in the real world. Knowing that people do not exist in vacuums void of society’s conditioning, it is important to understand the constraints and pathways that society places on individuals to “act on one’s behalf” (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001).

My personal story is one example of many that highlights the complexities and contradictions that exist in the study of life. By naming the complexities in my own pathway of conscientization, I am now better able to understand myself more holistically and historically. And by understanding myself and others around me as historical and complex beings, I can better understand the “practice of freedom” (Freire, 1970) as a complex and complicated process. As I come to better understand myself, through reflection and action, I can better understand my role in (re)shaping the world around me. It is my hope that readers of the stories contained in this dissertation come to understand them as complex.

Although there are many parallels between the activism present in the music of my upbringing and in the writings of popular critical theorists of the mid-20th century—particularly Paulo Freire, whose work is the foundation of this proposed study—there are some contextual differences that must be acknowledged when researching 21st century activism.

**Context of 21st century activism**

We are no longer in a period of social unrest like the civil rights eras of the 1960’s and 1970’s. We are in a period when the public fabric of society is being destroyed.
Agents of change in the 21st century must navigate ideologies and practices of neoliberalism, austerity, choice, colonization, expansion, post-racial ideologies and exploitation that are different from the contexts of mass social movements of the 60s and 70s.

While many of these conditions existed well before the start of the 21st century, post-racial and neoliberal ideologies separate the past from the present. Given that the United States has elected, twice, the nation’s first Black president, some may believe that there is no need to use race as an analytical lens through which to view society. Even Barack Obama used post-racial rhetoric in his presidential speeches. At the 2013 commencement for Morehouse University, a designated Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) institute, Obama (2013) said

> Well, we’ve got no time for excuses…in today’s hyperconnected, hypercompetitive world, with millions of young people from China and India and Brazil -- many of whom started with a whole lot less than all of you did -- all of them entering the global workforce alongside you, nobody is going to give you anything that you have not earned.

This is one example of the post-racial rhetoric that has permeated U.S. society in the recent years. While presidential narratives only give one individualized point of view, they help demonstrate the post-racial narratives present in 21st century discourse. Many assume that a country that can elect a Black president is also a country that has moved beyond its past history of racism. Seen through this lens, racism is an individual trait carried out by individual actors, not a systemic structure endemic to U.S. society.

Legal scholar Sumi Cho (2009) defined post-racialism as a
21st century ideology that reflects a belief that due to the significant racial progress that has been made, the state need not engage in race-based decision-making or adopt race-based remedies, and that civil society should eschew race as a central organizing principle of social action. (p. 1594)

Activists in the 21st century, in ways unlike the civil rights movements of the past, navigate post-racial terrains; an important demarcation from the past.

Neoliberalism, what David Harvey (2005) defined as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2), is the second differentiating factor by which I use to distinguish the mass social movements of the 60’s and 70’s from the social movements that have erupted in the early part of the 21st century. Neoliberalism has created a highly individualized and competitive society, making collective work towards liberation even more difficult.

Jacqueline Kennely (2011), who studied youth activism in the 21st century Canadian context wrote, “the neoliberal context is the spatial and ideological location through which the young activists within this study have both come of age come to their politics” (p. 8). Viewed through this lens, “the neoliberal subject is forever positioned as a choosing subject and thus…is forever burdened with the fear that one may make the wrong choice” (p. 63).

These forms of citizenship frame democratic processes within the current systems of regulation and exploitation. They may limit the alteration of systems of domination and oppression as they aim at “fixing” the individual through social responsibility with no alteration of the systems that create the context of agency. These forms of citizenship
also create a de-emphasis on collective action and, rather, promote individualism; a defining feature of the free-market. Individualism not only undermines collectivity, but also creates a culture of competition, another defining feature of the free-market (Harvey, 2005). This model of activism creates little room for change, let alone a deep systemic analysis, which may lead to the critique of society’s political, economic, and social systems.

On the other hand, the state has created labels for activists who seek to alter the conditions of the state, those who explicitly choose to not act within them to reproduce societal conditions: “The activist as enemy of the state, the troubleshooting hooligans who are to be found on the front covers of newspapers being dragged away by heavily armored police” (Kennely, 2011, p. 65). We can look to the conditions of Ferguson, Missouri following the death of Mike Brown for such an example. Following the refusal of the state to indict the officer who fatally shot an eighteen-year-old Black male, people from all over the nation, particularly Black youth, took to the street in protest fighting for democratic justice. Rather than being broadcast as democratic citizens carrying out their constitutional right to assemble and protest, the media flooded television screens and radio airwaves with images and signs of unruliness, destruction, disobedience, and a lack of empathy. Young Black men were shown looting stores and burning down buildings, not collectivizing and organizing. Absent from the media were the stories of peaceful intergenerational and multi-racial protest against police brutality taking place. These individuals were positioned, through media portrayals, as “the activist as enemy of the state” (p. 65).

While neoliberalism and post-racial rhetoric may distinguish the current time period from the past, there are many similarities that bridge the two periods. The 21st
century has seen the emergence of politically conscious and active Black youth who have, like their predecessors, built movements based on ideological connections between race and capitalism and their willingness to be “unapologetic” (Black Youth Project 100) in their actions. Black Youth Project 100’s “Agenda to Fund Black Futures” explicitly seeks to repair the harm done by racism and capitalism. Black Lives Matter chapters have been created all over the county as a demonstration of the need for the rest of the world to recognize Black people in their fullest humanity. Like the 60’s and 70’s, the early part of the 21st century can be seen as a tipping point—a point where people have come together to question our political and societal values based on the oppression of people across race, class, and gender. And like the 60’s and 70’s youth are actively participating in this charge.

Given the oppressive conditions that many urban youth of color face navigating the complexities of the world, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers should better understand what practices and contexts help them to resist, and even alter, these conditions. We must also look to youth themselves to better understand how they are developing the capacity to act on the world, how they are coming to terms with these new agentic identities, and how their agency shifts and changes in a real world that positions activists of color as enemies. Finally, we must begin to understand how youth and adults work together to “re-invent, in communion, a society where exploitation and the verticalization of power do not exist, where the disenfranchised segments of society are not excluded or interdicted from reading the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1998, p. 9).

2 Like the Black Panther Party
During my time as an elementary school teacher, I saw the value in rooting my pedagogy within a popular education framework (Freire, 1970) that created explorative contexts for my students to critically question their experiences in the world, use inquiry as a methodology to locate information, and act on their findings in ways that added to the social consciousness of the community (both in and out of school). Providing youth and their adult counter-parts (teachers, parents, community members) with these opportunities may foster a collective critical hope, a critical hope that may move dispossessed communities away from fatalistic (or passive) understandings of the world towards understandings of their collective power. Antonia Darder (2002) reminds us that these forms of critical consciousness “must be actively cultivated and nourished within classrooms through critical dialogues and social relationships that reshape our perception and interaction with one another and the world” (p. 15).

**Research Questions**

Collective hope and imagination can lead to a great deal of change, but understanding the development of that collective imagination may lead us, as researchers and education practitioners, to better understand how these dispositions are constructed. When researchers examine the spaces, processes, logic, and facilitated experiences young people are exposed to, or not, we may come to a better understanding of how they exercise their human agency and resistance to dismantle oppression and injustice.

This intrinsic and descriptive case study (Merriam, 1998) examined the relationship(s) between agency development in young people and Paulo Freire’s popular education approach. Particularly, I was interested in understanding how five youth of color, in the post-racial context of their 21st century city, developed and transformed their
agency using Freire’s popular education approach. Freire’s popular education approach, also called a *problem-posing pedagogy* (1970), creates spaces of inquiry where people are equipped with traditional and non-traditional tools of research and work alongside educators to develop solutions to complex problems of their lives. Through the critical investigation of their lived realities, and thus the unveiling of the societal “limits” (Freire, 1970) existent in marginalized spaces, people may begin to understand the systemic conditions in their communities while also developing ways to shift oppressive political, social, and economic conditions that create and maintain oppression.

I use the term “approach” to distinguish between the methodology of this report and the methods of inquiry used by the research participants to conduct their own inquiry investigations. While this dissertation is a case study, the context of study used its own research methodology (what I am referring to as Freire’s popular education approach).

Freire’s popular education approach stems from his experiences over several decades of his life, in settings across many continents (Freire, 1970; Freire, 1978; Freire, 1998).

For one year I served as executive director of an East Chicago, Indiana, non-profit organization, Greenhouse Fellowship. Its mission statement was “cultivating power within youth of East Chicago to act on their worlds” (www.greenhousefellowship.org). Over the course of a year, five recent high school graduates (all from the local high school) were employed full time (with a salary of $24,000.00 plus benefits) through the fellowship in hopes that they remained in East Chicago and contribute to its social well-being. The Fellows, as a part of their work responsibilities, attended two full-day seminars per week hosted in our office, worked three days a week in a local social service

---

3 Greenhouse Fellowship started the year with nine Fellows. Only five completed the program. This study will focus on the five that completed the program.
agencies supporting the greater well-being of East Chicago, and by the end of the year, designed and implemented several projects of their choice.

Over the course of the year, we (the Fellows, myself, and an associate director) taught and learned from each other, investigated our lived realities through research, and developed and implemented actions. Ultimately, we hoped to alter (or at least better understand) the systemic conditions that the Fellows, and their community, faced.

During my time as executive director I began to pay close attention to the emergent identities of the Fellows, the role that society played in defining their activism (agency), and what these young people were doing within the existent societal limitations and pathways to navigate the complexities of the world to make it a more humanizing place.

My experiences in East Chicago served as the premise to this dissertation, one that explores the relationship between popular education and youth activism in the 21st century through the close examination of one case.

More specifically, this intrinsic and descriptive case study sought to better understand:

- how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship, the site of investigation, made meaning of their lived realities using a problem-posing pedagogy (Freire, 1970);
- how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship negotiated their agentic identities in the real world—a real world that encourages them to democratically act within the system, not dismantle and recreate it; and
- how the adult-facilitators—both administrators and guests—in Greenhouse Fellowship created youth spaces of agency development and how they facilitated this process.
Terms of this dissertation

Here, and in future sections of this writing, I define agency as “the confidence and skills to act on one’s behalf” (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). For the purposes of this research I use the term agency to include theories of resistance (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001) and youth activism research (Ginwright, 2010a, 2010b). I also am using the term popular education to be inclusive of other participatory and emancipatory research methods including participatory action research (PAR), youth participatory action research (YPAR), and action research.
Chapter 2—Theoretical Framework: A review of the literature on popular education, agency, critical race theory, and healing.

There are four bodies of research that form the theoretical framework for this study: literature on popular education, agency, Critical Race Theory, and healing. I will begin by discussing each of the frameworks separately. Following, I will write about their inter-relatedness and how I utilized them in the proposed study.

When looking at activism in the post-civil right era, Ginwright (2010a) reminds his readers “healing and hope were critical prerequisites to activism and social change” (p. 7). Without a systemic understanding that helps individuals understand their personal trauma as resulting from collective oppression, meaningful forms of personal and collective resistance can be difficult (hooks, 1993). Freire (1970) wrote, “as [students] are increasingly posed with problems related to themselves in the world and with the world, [they] will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge” (p. 62). That is, as students see themselves as actors participating in larger systems in the world’s functioning, they may be more likely inclined to respond to, attempting to change, those systems.

Agency can be seen as a link to (a) one’s ability to critically examine the world and (b) the resistance of oppressive conditions that limit love, care, and justice. Freire’s popular education framework serves as a widely-used approach to create and maintain liberatory educative contexts. Critical Race Theory (CRT) provides a framework by which to theorize race and racism, useful in analyzing educational contexts (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) like the proposed case. Finally, a framework of healing acknowledges trauma as a barrier to wellness and may help bridge the connections between personal well-being and agency.
Popular Education

Freire’s popular education approach (1970) to teaching and learning, what he called a problem-posing pedagogy, seeks to engage communities in a dialectical process of teaching and learning, of reflection and action. Marginalized communities may come to more deeply understand the social injustices that have impacted their daily lives through this process. It is not that they have not experienced these injustices. Rather, it is that they may not have exposure to the analytical frameworks by which to critically dissect the “generative themes” (Freire, 1970)—situations that people experience—existent in their very lives. This emancipatory framework seeks to go beyond the construction of an analytical framework of knowledge—it is built on the premise of action. That is, while one learns, one is also doing, and while one is doing one is also learning; the two are in dialectical relationship and should be viewed as such. Freire (1970) wrote

Problem-posing education, as a humanist and liberating praxis, posits as fundamental that the people subjected to domination must fight for their emancipation. To that end, it enables teachers and students to become subjects of the education process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which result in their humanization. (p. 67)

Freire, and other Freirean scholars to follow him (Darder, 2015; Gutstein, 2006; Giroux, 1983; hooks, 2003, 2004; Shor, 1987), believed that through the collective and critical investigation of one’s daily life and action to (re)write it, conscientization—the development of a social and political consciousness grounded in reflection and action—
could occur. A critical reading of the world refers to an observation of the world through critical lenses that may, but are not limited to, include: race, class, gender, sexuality, and age. Through a critical reading of the world, communities may find the need to take action on the world, seeing it as unfinished. From this stance, education can be seen as emancipatory, using students’ lives as curriculum—engaging them in a study of their reality and action upon it.

Because our individual consciousness is shaped by social constructs, it is important to identify those constructs as they exist in our lives and understand how they condition our thinking and action. Freire and Macedo (1987) wrote, “In many cases individuals have not yet perceived themselves as conditioned” (p. 48). Through the development of conscientization, individuals come to know not only themselves but their connection to larger structures of society. Speaking on conscientization, or *conscientização*, Darder (2015) wrote

This process of radicalization predisposes us to reevaluate constantly our lives, attitudes, behaviors, actions, decisions, and relationships in the world. It is through this dynamic process of change that conscientização develops and evolves, as we come to engage courageously the oppressive forces that impact our lives, intervening with greater confidence and strength. By confronting together the risks inherent in our radicalization, we stop surrendering our lives, our children, and our communities to the decisions of others. (p. 116)

By understanding one’s self, and the relationship one’s reality has to larger structures in society, one may be prone to take action—shaping and transforming their social reality. Freire and Macedo (1987) wrote, “Students begin to understand that the more profound
dimension of their freedom lies in the recognition of constraints that can be overcome” (p. 48).

Through this self-actualizing process, communities of learners may come to see themselves as “unfinished.” Students can engage in the process of learning about their lives while also developing a critical understanding of the conditions of their worlds through the critical investigation of familiar situations. People may develop a need to move closer to completing their lives as they recognize them as unfinished (knowing that we can never be fully complete). Freire and Macedo (1987) remind us that “It is impossible to humanly exist without assuming the right and the duty to opt, to decide, to struggle, to be political” (p. 53).

One of the major themes of a radical pedagogy like Freire’s is the development of human agency (Giroux, 1983; Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). “Man [sic] makes history based on the concrete conditions he [sic] finds” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 60). People can become authors of their lives through the critical investigation of the concrete realities of life and action, creating a new set of concrete conditions by which to live. This process is a demonstration of human agency. Antonia Darder (2015) wrote

The struggle for change begins, then, at the moment when human beings become both critically aware and intolerant of the oppressive conditions in which they find themselves and push toward new way of knowing and being in the world. This process signals that moment of consciousness when individuals in community experience a breakthrough and decide to take another path, despite their uncertain future. (p. 80)

According to Freire, as people objectify and critically interrogate their worlds, which they have the ability to separate themselves from, they may also develop pathways
to overcome situations that limit them as subjects of reality—“limit situations” (Freire 1970). Through “limit acts” (Freire, 1970), actions directed at negating and overcoming passive acceptance, “reality is transformed and these situations are superseded” (p. 100). Generative themes contain and are contained in limit-situations. When generative themes are hidden beneath the limit situations, people’s responses cannot alter the systems that oppress and marginalize them. Once people begin to see these themes as the barriers to their humanity, “they begin to direct their increasingly critical actions towards achieving the untested feasibility implicit in that perception” (p. 102). Recognizing that oppressive conditions in society may be linked to the ability to see beyond the concrete conditions of one’s life, a systemic analysis by which to view and examine the world may help people identify these oppressive conditions. “To truly participate and intervene effectively in this evolutionary process, human beings need to be able to perceive critically the conditions that shape our lives” (Darder, 2015, p. 118). Freire’s popular education framework is a decoding process that supports this critical analysis.

People may create a need for authentic revolutionary action as they critically investigate their lives and find them unfinished; action may lead communities towards humanization, love, and equity because of the particularly constructed analytical framework borrowed from Freire. Freire (1970) wrote, “Originating in objective conditions, revolution seeks to supersede the situation of oppression by inaugurating a society of women and men in the process of continuing liberation” (p. 137). Again it is important to note here that the two parts—reflection of the lived experience and action—do not concretize in stages or in linearity but are dialectically in relationship all of the time. As we think we are also acting, and as we act we are always reflecting. This is key to an understanding of praxis.
In summary, at least in the theoretical sense, a popular education approach not only gives participants the tools of inquiry, analysis, and action, but it may support their critical capacity to view and alter their worlds. Through the investigation of one’s own lived reality, one may come to see themselves as incomplete and in need of freedom. Summarizing his own view of the liberatory nature of his popular education framework, Freire (1998) wrote

Education will be liberating as long as it sponsors the conscious and creative reflection and action of oppressed classes about their own process of liberation. To assume its hegemony, the people need an education of quality. They need the tools, appropriation of knowledge, methods, and techniques, to which their access today is restricted to a privileged minority. This implies the systematic and critical appropriation of reading, writing, and mathematics, and the scientific and technological principles. Even more so, this implies the appropriation of methods of acquisition, production, and dissemination of learning: research, discussion, argument, the use of the most diverse methods of expression, communication, and art. (p. 51)

Agency

While an understanding of the ways society is reproduced to maintain power and privilege economically (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Giroux, 1983), culturally (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990), and through hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) may be important in understanding the ways in which structures in society maintain power and privilege, they may lead us to view individuals as passive recipients of oppression. Freire (1998) reminds us that we, as individuals in the world, “are conditioned, but not determined” (p.
12). We are conditioned by the societal structures we live and operate in, but those structures do not determine our destiny in the world. Recognizing those structures may support agency.

This does not imply that we should not examine the conditioning of society when studying agency, but rather come to understand the two, context and agency, as inter-related and complex. Knowing that people do not exist in vacuums void of society’s conditioning, it is important to understand the constraints and pathways that society places on individuals to “act on one’s behalf” (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). While political, economic, and social systems may create the conditions by which society functions and is reproduced, the recipients of such conditioning are not always passively acceptant of these conditions. It is in our quest to become more human (Freire, 1970) that individuals and groups have resisted society’s conditioning. In an effort to better understand how people respond (agency, resistance) to oppressive conditions, we should look closer at the context—serving as a reproductive model for the state and a space of agency development.

Context has been a major focal point of many scholars (Bandura, 2006; Freire, 1978; Tuck & Yang, 2014) studying agency as they believe it sets the stage for pathways of activism. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2014) wrote, “to understand youth resistance we cannot hold it apart from the particular conditions under which it occurs, conditions which include the actions of other youth and non-youth actors” (p. 5). The actions of individuals are dialectically related to the environmental conditions they must navigate. Giddens (1984) also reminds us that that agency is manifested out of the social structures created and maintained by society:
human agency is rooted in social systems. Therefore, personal agency operates within a broad network of sociostructural influences. For the most part, social structures represent authorized systems of rules, social practices, and sanctions designed to regulate human affairs. These sociostructural functions are carried out by human beings occupying authorized roles. (p. 14)

Descriptions of the “good citizen” and the “activist as enemy of the state” (Kennely, 2011) not only show the promoted purpose of active citizenship across the world, but the dichotomization also leads us to investigate the racialized, gendered, and classed role of activism, and the resulting responses from the neoliberal state.

Responding to this dualistic ideological position, that posits some acts as good and others as bad, Robin Kelley (2014) wrote, “We don’t need to prepare youth for active citizenship. They need space for completely revamping and rethinking and interrogating American citizenship and American democracy as they are currently defined” (p. 89).

The world does not need more good citizens to reproduce the current conditions of society; it needs justice-centered praxis to transform oppressive conditions into more humanizing, communal, affective, and just ones.

Shawn Ginwright (2010b) wrote, “Dramatic educational, economic, political and cultural transformations in urban America, coupled with decades of unmitigated violence, have shaped both the constraints and opportunities for activism among black youth and the communities in which they live” (p. 77). Ginwright (2010a, 2010b) noticed that youth activism in 21st century Oakland was much different than the radical movements of the 60’s and 70’s there; this political diagnoses helps illuminate the, often-times unwritten, rules of spaces and places construct both the limitations and opportunities for youth to question their lived realities in critical ways that help them to locate systemic
causes to issues they, and others in their community, face; and allow them to act on those new found ways of understanding the world that promote love, equity, and justice (Freire, 1970). Ginwright (2010a) also found that the destruction of political organizations, the loss of blue-collar jobs, and the influx of crack cocaine—what he calls the “urban trifecta” (p. 42)—all contributed to the decline in activist organizations and the increase in social service organizations. These social service organizations often lack the “radical infrastructure that render hope, vision, and self-transformation” (p. 52) that was present in the radical organizations of the 1960’s and 70’s.

Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) used Giroux’s resistance theory (1983; 1990), critical race theory (CRT), and Latina/Latino critical race theory (LatCrit) frameworks to better understand agency development across any setting. LatCrit is one of the many variations of CRT. Although it is similar to CRT in the ways it positions race and racism, it differs in that, “LatCrit is concerned with a progressive sense of a coalitional Latina/Latino pan-ethnicity and addresses issues often ignored by critical race theorists such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype, and sexuality” (p. 311).

Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) framework, which views resistance across four categories (Figure 1), helps researchers gain a better understanding of the types of resistance they may see exhibited from youth and also helps researchers to better understand the outcomes of resistance across a trajectory—a trajectory that ranges from behavior that “lacks both a critique of her or his oppressive conditions and is not motivated by social justice” (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 317) to “student behavior that illustrates both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice” (p. 319).
Like Freire’s (1970) popular education framework, Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) did not think of their resistance framework as “static or rigid” (p. 317). Rather, they promoted the use of the framework in more nuanced ways more appropriate to the contradictions and nuances of human agency writing, “within each quadrant is a range of a student’s critique of social oppression and motivation for social justice” (p. 317).

They found that some forms of oppositional actions represented “reactionary behavior” (p. 317)—actions where “students lack both a critique of her or his oppressive conditions and is not motivated by social justice” (p. 317).
They also discovered that some oppositional behaviors from students “may have some critique of their oppressive conditions, but were not motivated by an interest in social justice” (p. 317). They termed this resistance “self-defeating resistance” and was not transformational. An example of self-defeating resistance can be seen in the “high school dropout who may have a compelling critique of the schooling system but then engages in behavior (dropping out of school) that is self-defeating and does not help transform her or his oppressive status” (p. 317). This form of resistance “helps to re-create the oppressive conditions from which it originated” (p. 317).

To describe “oppositional behavior of students who are motivated by a need for social justice yet hold no critique of the systems of oppression” (p. 318) Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) coined the term “conformist resistance” (p. 318). They wrote, “although some social change is possible through conformist resistance, without a critique of the social, cultural, and economic forms of oppression, it does not offer the greatest possibility for social justice” (p. 319). An example of conformist behavior can be seen by the individual who does voter registration campaigning for the sole purpose of increasing the number of Black voters. While this may increase the number of minority votes cast, it does not contribute to the political ideology that can assist one in making an informed voting decision.

The fourth domain of oppositional behavior, according to Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001), is “transformational resistance” (p. 319). Transformational resistance refers to “student behavior that illustrates both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice. . . the student holds some level of awareness and critique of her or his oppressive conditions and structures of domination and must be at least somewhat motivated by a sense that individual and social change is possible” (p. 320).
The authors describe two categories of transformational resistance. “Internal resistance” (p. 324) refers to transformational resistance that takes place within systems of oppression to create change. Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) wrote, “The behavior of internal transformational resistance appears to conform to institutional or cultural norms and expectations, however individuals are consciously engaged in a critique of oppression” (p. 324). An example of internal resistance could be “the Student of Color who holds a critique of cultural and economic oppression and is motivated to go to graduate school by a desire to engage in a social justice struggle against this oppression” (p. 324).

“External resistance” (p. 325) “involves a more conspicuous and overt type of behavior, and the behavior does not conform to institutional or cultural norms and expectations” (p. 325). This transformational resistance “is openly visible and overtly operates outside the traditional system” (p. 326). An example of external resistance could be a “civil rights worker who participated in boycotts and demonstrations in hopes of securing the integration of public facilities” (p. 325).

In summary, when studying agency development in youth of color it is important to consider the contextual foundations of spaces and communities that create the defining conditions for activism. While the state and its actors reproduce neoliberal ideologies, the public does not always passively accept this conditioning. Secondly, Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) resistance framework looks closely at the role race plays in agency development. Aside from making race and racism central to their understanding of the world, Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) framework examines agency across a spectrum—not a binary. It helps to better nuance the relationship that people have with
both resistance and reproduction, helping researchers to better understand the complexities that exist for people coming to develop agency.

**Critical Race Theory (CRT)**

Critical Race Theory (CRT), with roots in Critical Legal Studies (CLS), is a set of principles, methods, and in more contemporary forms, a praxis that aims to “identify, analyze, and transform. . . structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color” (Solórzano, 1997, p. 6). CRT initially was used to critique the formal and objective discourses existent in the law, recognizing the impact of race and racism on social structures in U.S. society (Bell, 1987; Crenshaw, 2002; Delgado, 1989; Delgado & Stephancic, 2000). Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, and Crenshaw (1993) described six major tenets of CRT:

- CRT recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
- CRT is hesitant to accept claims of neutrality, colorblindness, and meritocracy and believes that these claims should be examined critically for their political and ideological stances.
- CRT denounces a-historical perspectives of the law and adopts a stance that calls for these perspectives to be examined for their contextual and historical implications.
- CRT recognizes the experiential knowledge of dispossessed people, often called counter-stories. These counter-stories serve as a representation of the lived experiences often void within mainstream discourse.
- CRT is interdisciplinary. It is not domain specific and can provide an analytical lens to view the implications of race and racism in any setting.
CRT works towards ending racial oppression a part of a larger goal to end all oppression. (p. 6)

Ladson-Billings and Tate’s 1995 article set the groundwork for the contextualization of CRT into education. They wrote “we attempt to theorize race and to use it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity” (p. 11). Since the publication of Ladson-Billings and Tate’s (1995) groundbreaking work, education researchers have used CRT as a framework to theorize and analyze race and racism in education. Solóranzo (1998) wrote

The critical race theory framework for education is different from other CRT frameworks because it simultaneously attempts to foreground race and racism in the research as well as challenge the traditional paradigms, methods, texts, and separate discourse on race, gender, and class by showing how these social constructs intersect to impact on communities of color. Further, it focuses on the racialized, gendered, and classed experiences of communities of color and offers a liberatory and transformative method for examining racial/ethnic, gender, and class discrimination. It also utilizes transdisciplinary knowledge and the methodological base of ethnic studies, women’s studies, sociology, history, and the law to forge better understandings of the various forms of discrimination. (p. 63)

Dixon and Rousseau (2006) conducted a literature review of education research using CRT tenets and found four common threads:

- Racism is endemic to US society. CRT serves as a framework to view school policy as an extension of racism.
• CRT adoptions in education research “questions mainstream discourse centered on neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness and merit” (p. 22).
• CRT in education “insists on historical and contextual analyses” (p. 22).
• CRT centers the stories of people of color. These counter-stories have purpose in documenting and making sense of the experiences of dispossessed people.

The authors recommended more mixed-methods uses of CRT as “any means necessary to address the problem of inequity in education” (p. 22). Additionally, Dixon and Rousseau (2006) found “the extent to which these [CRT] recommendations are carried out either by the recommender or others, is not clear” (p. 23). They called for more action in the field.

Ten years before Dixon and Rousseau conducted their literature review, Yamamoto (1996) published an article calling for critical race theorists to engage in what he called Critical Race Praxis. This contemporary rendering of CRT called for researchers to use the tenets of CRT in our work with communities of color in more pragmatic ways. This shift, going beyond using CRT as an analytical research lens, urged researchers to adopt the following tenets:

• to “examine the racialization of a controversy and the interconnecting influences of heterosexism, patriarchy, and class, and locate that examinations within a critique of the political economy,” (p. 878);
• to “perform in the . . . setting to dismantle subordinating social structures and to rectify injustice” (Yamamoto, 1997, p. 879);
• to “inquire into changes in the material conditions of racial oppression” (Yamamoto, 1997, p. 880); and
to use *Critical Race Praxis* as a “guide toward future reflective action”

A number of education researchers have utilized Yamamoto’s (1997) framework in education research and activism (Jayakumar & Adamian, 2015; Stovall 2013). Stovall (2013) wrote

I incorporate his [Yamamoto] suggestions to entail the work of educational researchers who are concerned with social justice. As method, Yamamoto suggests that race praxis is characterized by reflective action. Such reflection is based on the application of theoretical concepts to the work done in solidarity with communities, and the recasting of said concepts in relation to our on-the-ground experiences. (p. 565)

In summary, CRT provides a framework by which to view race and racism in society. It, as a framework, sees racism as endemic to the U.S. society, and by extension, schools. CRT rejects liberal ideologies like post-racialism and values the stories and experiences of dispossessed people. Finally, it demands historical and contextual analyses. More contemporary scholars have adopted CRT as framework of praxis (reflection and action) embodied during emancipatory work alongside dispossessed communities of color. Tenets from both theories (CRT and Critical Race Praxis) can serve as a useful framework in understanding and dismantling the visible and invisible manifestations of race and racism in education research.

**Healing**

In recent years, more attention has been given to meeting the social and emotional needs of young people in, and out of, schools. However, the interventions have often
been individualized. Ginwright (2015) wrote, “rather than identifying how to transform the root causes of stress from underfunded schools, violence, and joblessness. . . writers. . . overly rely on individual character development and social emotional learning as the antidote to building healthy, strong, young people” (p. 16). Common terms like “grit,” “growth mindsets,” and “pulling one’s self up by the bootstraps” fail to respond to systemic and structural antecedents to trauma—what Dr. Bruce Perry defined as “an experience, or pattern of experiences, that impairs the proper functioning of the person’s stress-response system” (Supin, 2016). Policies that have eroded public education funding and led to an increase in state-sanctioned forms of violence (mass-incarceration, zero-tolerance discipline policies in schools, deportation) “limit opportunities and criminalize young people of color. . . over time these conditions erode hope” (Ginwright, 2005, p. 19) and result in “accumulated trauma” (p. 20). Ginwright (2015) provided an example of the relationship between trauma and toxic policy:

A young man is wounded while he witnesses the shooting of his best friend (trauma 1). While in the hospital recovering from his injury, he is approached, questioned, and accused by the police of being responsible for the shooting (trauma 2). Angry at the accusation, and still grieving the loss of his friend, he returns to school and gets in an altercation with his teacher for refusing to remove his hat in the classroom. As a result of the altercation, he is suspended from school and escorted off campus by the police in handcuff (trauma 3). He internalizes his grief and anger and loses hope. . . (trauma 4). In the attempt to ease his stress, he self-medicates with marijuana, is arrested. . . and incarcerated (trauma 5). (p. 20)
Dispossessed youth of color have trauma from their lived experiences and from their ancestral genealogies. As adult facilitators of their educative experiences, we should be mindful of how trauma impacts young people’s ability to engage in a (re)writing of the world. Young people need to heal from the trauma of their lives.

In his book *Black Youth Rising*, Ginwright (2010a) wrote communities can provide important healing opportunities—opportunities for youth to reflect, to develop critical consciousness, to hope and to change social conditions. . . In healing communities. . . battle scars are mended, racial wounds are healed, and ruptured communities are made whole again. . . By rebuilding collective identities (racial, gendered, youth), exposing youth to critical thinking about social conditions, and building activism, black youth heal by removing self-blame and act to confront pressing school and community problems. (pp. 11-12)

Ginwright’s (2015) framework for radical healing is a five-feature model. Each component, Culture, Agency, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement (CARMA) combined together to create a framework for healing and responding to trauma in youth. Each of the components is detailed as follows:

- **Culture:** Culture anchors young peoples’ connection to their racial and ethnic identities. Radical healing processes in this “element” affirm, integrate, and celebrate cultural and indigenous practices into schools and organizations (p. 26). They may lead to a sense of belonging, awareness, and pride in youth (p. 26).

---

Agency: Agency, as stated earlier, is “the confidence and skills to act on one’s behalf” (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). Radical healing processes in this “element” create “space for youth voice, reflection of root causes of social issues, and identify ways for young people to address community issues” (Ginwright, 2015, p. 26).

Relationships: Relationships create spaces and opportunities for young people to learn from each other, share their stories, and inquiry into the lived experience. Relationships lead to trust, vulnerability, and social capital.

Meaning: Meaning “is discovering our purpose, and building an awareness or our role in advancing justice” (p. 26). This element promotes individual healing, hope, purpose, and a sense of accomplishment (p. 26).

Achievement: Achievement “illuminates life’s possibilities and acknowledges movement toward explicit goals” (p. 26).

Ginwright (2015) highlighted “four approaches to healing justice that. . . attempt to resolve the tensions between structural change and healing” (p. 28). The first approach, transformative organizing “views social change as an ongoing process of personal reflection, individual and collective growth, communal healing, and personal transformation. Transformative organizing views healing and personal transformation as necessary steps to building healthy relationships” (p. 28). Restorative justice “repairs harm. . . and trust in a community” (p. 28). Healing circles “allow young people to discuss and collectively understand how trauma shapes their behaviors and attitudes and provides opportunities for healing, compassion, and support from other young people” (p. 28). The fourth approach is contemplative practices, “where activists use meditation and
mindfulness as ways to strengthen and build their . . . capacity to engage and sustain social change work” (p. 28).

As organizations and educators create space for young people to engage in open and honest dialogue, trauma may emerge and get shared. Justice-centered educators have a responsibility to create space for young people to name their pain, connect it to other people, and develop processes to move beyond it. Ginwright’s (2010, 2015) radical healing framework is useful in “preparing people to turn inward in order to focus on their own health, well-being, and happiness” (Ginwright, 2015, p. 27). The restorative and healing approaches to healing were useful in the research setting and the analyses used in this dissertation.

**Popular education, agency, Critical Race Theory, and healing: Their interrelatedness and how they fit within this research proposal?**

These four fields—Freire’s popular education approach, the study of agency, CRT, and healing—provide theoretical foundations for this research study. As youth activism becomes more visible in mainstream public discourse, it is likely that the study of youth agency will gain more traction in institutional settings. The four frameworks helped me to make better sense of the study of agency within the research setting.

As researchers continue to document, and make sense of, how youth in the 21st century engage in a reading and (re)writing of the world, I find it equally as important that we better understand the antecedents to youth agency development. Freire (1998) reminds us that “curiosity is what make me question, know, act, ask again, recognize” (p.

---

5 There are many organizations that fit this description. Black Lives Matter, Southside Together Organizing for Power, Fearless Leading by the Youth, and Black Youth Project 100 are a few examples that organize in Chicago.
By better understanding the catalysts and contexts that nurture the development of “epistemological curiosity” (Freire, 1998), we may begin to better understand the relationship this curiosity holds to education and youth activism in the 21st century. That is, we may be able to better understand the relationship between educative spaces grounded in popular education and agency development in youth in the United States, and the world.

The use of these inter-related frameworks also supported my analysis related to how the young people of this research study’s agentic identities developed and transformed over time and how they navigated and responded to social structures in the world. Humans are not just passive recipients of societal conditioning (i.e., racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty); the framing of studies and educative work seen through the lenses of popular education, agency development, CRT, and healing assisted me in my attempt to uncover the development of agentic identities rooted as they sat in relationship to the structures of society. How do communities come to terms and negotiate new identities formed by exploring the complexities of their lived realities? How does race influence and impact the world, and thus actors within the world? What contradictions, limitations, and pathways are placed on/created for communities to “re-write” their worlds, moving away from oppression and towards humanization and liberation? Although these questions are not directly answered through this research proposal, the findings of this study contributes to a better understanding of the complexities of these inquiries.

Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) transformational resistance framework gives researchers a lens to better understand the ways in which agency is expressed in the real world. The framework was especially useful for me when looking at the
interconnections of popular education, race, and agency development in youth. It supported my analysis in connecting agency exhibited by the research participants to a broader set of motivators and critiques. This framework also helped me during coding, leading me to search for clues related to the “motivators for transformational resistance” (Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 321) and how the Fellows came to develop these motivators.

Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) resistance framework also helped me to better understand how youth of color “respond to social and cultural reproduction” (p. 316). Knowing that youth are not passive individuals, their framework helped me to trace the responses of the participants in this study to broader world views and analyses.

Freire’s popular education approach theoretically highlights that individual and collective agency may be uncovered and transformed through the investigation of one’s lived reality. Through the process of praxis—reflection and action—individuals and collectives may come to see the world as unfinished, developing avenues to dismantle or change them and move towards ending their oppression. Freire urged for the development of this level of emancipatory consciousness through a critical praxis that required “ongoing participation as cultural citizens and subjects of the world. From this perspective, knowledge and the breakthroughs of consciousness it informs emanate critically and reflect the evolving social experiences of people themselves” (Darder, 2015, p. 81).

Freire’s popular education approach, while serving as the framework of this proposed research study, was also the grounding framework of the research site. Special attention was made to attempt to better understand, and write into, the ways Freire’s
emancipatory theories also influenced the five youth of color, and the adults, that participated in this study.

I used CRT and Critical Legal Praxis in this study as an analytical and praxis-based framework by which to theorize about, and act to dismantle, race and racism. Because CRT acknowledges the endemic nature of racism in the structures of society, I was able to better synthesize the relationship between the conceptions and relationships to agency within the research context to their broader relationship to histories of race and racism in East Chicago (the research setting) and the United States. This research valued and utilized the counter-stories of the participants of the study and their community. These counter-stories helped (re)tell the story of East Chicago, moving from away from deficit-based narratives and analyses towards asset-based portrayals of dispossessed people. Finally, because I came to this work as both researcher and participant, CRT was a living framework that informed the research setting (as much as this research). We, the research participants, were living CRT in our praxis—it was informing our reading and (re)writing of the world. CRT, in the case of this research, was rooted in praxis because it informed my reflection and action, working in solidarity, alongside the participants of this study.

Like Solarazo and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) use of CRT to “push the educational system to seriously address the education of Chicanas and Chicanas” (p. 313) I used CRT, through this research, as a mechanism to push Greenhouse Fellowship, as an educative institute, to center justice in the education of dispossessed disposed youth of color across the world.

I used Ginwright’s (2010, 2015) radical healing framework to analyze the organizational processes and contexts of the research setting. Additionally, I used radical
healing as a tool of analysis to better understand the participant’s evolving and transforming agentic identities. Given the research context, Ginwright’s framework was useful in building upon, and contributing to the body of research, highlighting the relationship between agency and healing. More specifically, Ginwright’s restorative and healing approaches supported a context that created space for the participants of this study to name their trauma, connect their pain to other people and structures in society, and develop processes to heal from their pain.

Theoretically, Freire’s (1970) popular education model, Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) transformational resistance framework, CRT’s framework for education research and praxis, and the radical healing framework borrowed here provided the backdrop that I used to examine the agency development of the research participants in this study. Because all four frameworks are rooted in the exploration of the world through a critical analysis, and because all four frameworks helped me to better understand agency through multiple systems, they seem to fit well, in concert with one another, within the scope of research I conducted.
Chapter 3—Methods

This chapter is organized into several key sections. First, I present the epistemological considerations that frame this case study. Because of my unique insider/outsider status to the research context I found it important to devote a section to my researcher status. Following the section on my positionality I present an explanation of the research context. Next, I discuss the sources of data and the methods of data analysis. Additional sections are devoted to a rationale for adopting researcher ethics, in lieu of metrics of validity and reliability, and issues of generalizability.

This research is best framed as a case study that seeks to examine the cultivation of agency in youth who participated in a year-long, paid, program rooted in Paulo Freire’s popular education approach. Using archival data collected by the organization for its own internal use and analytical tools used in traditional case studies, I present emergent findings relevant to the research questions.

Case study research is a qualitative research method in which a “bounded system” (Cresswell, 2007) is explored over a long period of time, “through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-based themes” (p. 73). All qualitative research is epistemologically centered on “the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). Seen through this constructivist lens, reality is not an object to be measured, but rather sets of observable conditions to be interpreted. The primary role of qualitative research, and thus the case study, is “to understand the meaning of knowledge constructed by people” (Yazan, 2015, p. 137).

This case study is particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. It is particularistic because “it focuses on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon” (Yazan,
2015, p. 139). Merriam (1998) wrote, “this specificity of focus makes it an especially good design for practical problems—for questions, situations, or puzzling occurrences arising from everyday practice” (p. 11).

All case studies intend to be descriptive in that they yield rich, thick descriptions of the phenomenon of study (Merriam, 1998). Thick descriptions are “the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated” (p. 11). I present stories that give meaning to the research participants’ “cultural norms, values, attitudes and notions, and the like” (Lincoln & Guba, 1981, p. 119) in relationship to the research questions proposed.

This case study is heuristic because it “can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader’s experience, or confirm what is known” (Merriam, 1998, p. 13). This case should contribute to readers’ questions related to youth agency and popular education. It may lead to “a rethinking of the phenomenon being studied” (Stake, 1981, p. 47).

**Greenhouse Fellowship: A contextual and methodological description of the case**

This section will provide a contextual description of the case and a description of the popular education approaches enacted by the research participants (Fellows) as part of their employment at Greenhouse Fellowship. Because there is a difference between the methods of this proposed case study and the methods of the research setting itself, this section may be useful in understanding the differences and similarities between the two methodological approaches.

East Chicago, Indiana is a small de-industrializing city situated about 25 miles southeast of downtown Chicago. Butting up against the shores of Lake Michigan, East
Chicago has always had a close relationship to industry. It is co-home (with Whiting, Indiana) to the nation’s sixth largest oil refinery (http://www.bp.com/en_us/bp-us/what-we-do/refining/whiting.html), a casino that has undergone several corporate management changes since its inception in 1997, and the “largest integrated steelmaking facility in North America” (http://usa.arcelormittal.com/Our-operations/Flat/Indiana-Harbor/). Combined revenues of these three industries are roughly 60 billion dollars annually but yet the city of East Chicago receives very little economic return. At one time in history, Inland Steel employed over 25,000 employees, most of whom resided in the local residential areas of East Chicago (in fact, many of the neighborhoods were built for the steel mill employees). At the turn of the 21st century, following the economic crash of 2008, the steel mill, under management from a global company, only employed approximately 4,800 employees (Greenhouse Fellowship, 2015) and those numbers continued to decrease over time.

The loss of jobs at the steel mill drastically changed the infrastructure of the city of East Chicago. The loss of jobs and decreasing membership in unions associated with them may have also contributed to a reduction of the agency that once was in East Chicago. When historicized, it seems as if a bulk of the agency development and activism in East Chicago was in direct relationship to union organizing efforts in the steel mills and cultural organizations resisting racism in the city at large. East Chicago has been home to many major labor strikes and other political and social justice actions. This change in the political climate (not in the legislative sense) impacted the agency and activism of East Chicagoans.

Once a major industrial hub, a popular socializing area, a place to see a movie in several different languages, a place built out of racial struggle and resistance, East
Chicago was, at the time of this study, attempting under the political regime in power to revitalize its economic infrastructure. Like other cities across the world, neoliberal ideologies permeated East Chicago’s political, economic, and social landscapes. The city, at the time of this study, sat within a period where the public was being dismantled. Many of the public-sector services were being transferred to private sector service providers or completely closed. East Chicago experienced the “urban trifecta” (Ginwright, 2010a, p. 42)—the loss of blue-collar jobs, increased drug sales and subsequent violence, and the destruction of political organizations.

Greenhouse Fellowship emerged under these historical conditions and attempted, organizationally, to navigate through them. Greenhouse Fellowship was a non-profit organization, started in East Chicago during the summer of 2014. Five Fellows completed the entire year program. Faith, Shawntay, JJ, Jaylah, and Juve all were recruited to apply for the Fellowship from the local high school, known best for its long-standing history of state basketball championships wins. See Table I for a demographic representation of the Fellows.

They each brought unique sets of abilities and beliefs to the space having had very different experiences growing up. The one year I spent with these five individuals

---

6 It is important to note here that Greenhouse Fellowship is no longer in operation. After one year, the funding agency decided to no longer support the organization monetarily. While not directly noted in this study, a discussion of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex (Samimi, 2010) could help better situate the case of study.

7 Greenhouse Fellowship started the year with nine Fellows. Only five completed the program. This study will focus on the five that completed the program.
gave me an intensive look into the lives of five youth of color coming to terms with their agentic identities. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fellow Name</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaylah</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juve</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shawntay</td>
<td>Puerto Rican and Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As executive director of the organization, I was charged with designing and implementing the first year of operation. Because of my own philosophical beliefs pertaining to leadership development, I felt that it was important for fellows to leave the program, after one year, having developed some level of critical analysis and experienced some level of action in the real world. Part of what attracted me to the program was its relationship to the real world. Eve Tuck (2009) reminds us that “people, in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against, celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels,

---

8 The five youth in the Fellowship are all youth of color. Three identify as Black, one is Mexican, and one is Black and Puerto Rican.
and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures” (p. 420). As the administrators of this program Meghan and I,9 like Eve Tuck, wanted to create a dialogic space where we (the Fellows, Meghan, and I) could unpack our lived complexities and contradictions while building a critical capacity to observe and (re)write our lives.

By focusing our work on the real-world complexities and contradictions existent in our lives, we could better understand how those contradictions were shaped over time and related to structures in society. I was not interested in designing a program where young people were engaged to do more traditional forms of community service/civic engagement (cleaning up trash, feeding the homeless, conducting clothing drives). While these services were important (and we still participated in them during our year), I felt that these acts would not necessarily lead to the dismantling (nor questioning) of the root causes that created the conditions of oppression in East Chicago (the research setting).

I felt, like Freire and others, that a critical analysis, combined with an ethics of praxis, could assist the youth employed through the Fellowship to identify root causes of issues existent in their lives and could assist them in developing pathways of action that could chip away at the root manifestations of these issues. Speaking to this very issue, Tuck (2009) writes “without the context of racism and colonization, all we are left with is the damage, and this makes our stories vulnerable to pathologizing analysis” (p. 415). This pathologizing analysis may lead one to believe that the more traditional forms of service are helping to eliminate issues existent in communities, when they may in fact, be exacerbating and/or reproducing them.

---

9 There were two administrators in Greenhouse Fellowship, Meghan and me. We were the only staff other than the Fellows.
Methodologically, the Fellowship’s practice was grounded in a popular education approach (Freire, 1970). We (the Fellows, Meghan, and I) collectively used codifications of the Fellows’ lived realities to “apprehend the complex of contradictions” (p. 95) existent in their lives to develop a critical analysis (this is a description of the methodology of the research setting, not of this proposed case study). Within the contradictions “individuals analyzing their own reality become aware of their prior, distorted perceptions and thereby come to have a new perception of that reality” (p. 95).

Because of this philosophical stance on agency development, I designed the year-long experience that used Freire’s emancipatory philosophy and popular education methods to facilitate a collaborative process that the Fellows used to develop questions about their lives, investigate them critically, and act on them in ways that help to deconstruct their root causes. During seminars, we did just that!

Grounded under four principles: self, community, theory, and action, we spent every Monday and Friday developing questions and seeking answers. The curriculum was almost entirely generative; we constructed it based on previous experiences (i.e., what developed in the previous seminar session) of the group and sought to meet the emergent intellectual, social, and emotional needs of our inquiries. Over the course of the year we were together, we covered hundreds of topics, some facilitated by outsiders, while others relied specifically on the expertise within the group. Seminars became the place where we redefined our individual identities but also a context for us to develop a collective understanding of the world. Over the course of the year, the Fellows participated in over 800 hours of these seminar sessions.

As part of their employment, each Fellow spent three days a week at a local social service agency. At Greenhouse Fellowship, we defined social service agencies as any
organization attempting to contribute to the well-being of East Chicago. Although we had an extensive application and interview process for each of these agencies, many of them were the “traditional” service agencies that I previously described. Because there were almost no organizations in East Chicago that approached civic engagement in the philosophical tradition that we did at Greenhouse Fellowship, tension existed that we attempted to unpack throughout our year together: “do you blow up the system or work within it to create critical change?”—what Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) refer to as “internal transformational resistance” (p. 324) and “external transformational resistance” (p. 325). None the less, placement in these agencies hoped to develop the Fellows’ (a) sense of current work taking place to contribute to the well-being of East Chicago, (b) academic and career skills, and (c) a better understanding of the needs of their community. Throughout the year, each Fellow worked almost 1,600 hours in various social service agencies in East Chicago. Each Fellow worked at the same agency for the duration of their placement.

Finally, the Fellow-created projects (completed throughout the year) were an attempt to give Fellows the opportunity to enact their new identities of agency in the real world. Conceptually, the Fellows, equipped with new sets of knowledge, created projects that they developed from their inquiry investigations during seminar sessions, in their field placements, and their new-found analyses of their lived experiences. Over the year, Fellows participated in several traditional service projects (clothing drives, volunteering at the local elementary school’s science fair, hosting a free prom makeup and hair event). They also completed several major critical inquiry-to-action projects including: turning our office into a performance space open to teens one evening a month, surveying over 1,500 youth in East Chicago to better understand their attitudes and desires for East
Chicago, organizing for over eight months in an attempt to create more engaging programming for teens in the local library system, developing a comprehensive community tour of East Chicago that explored the city’s history but also identified the root causes of some of its current conditions, and initiating a community-created public art exhibit in an attempt to reverse the deficit perceptions of East Chicago.

Prior to my hiring, members from the board of directors hired the first cohort of Fellows based on their interest, a written application, and in-person interview. All nine applicants to the program were offered positions and accepted employment (although only five completed the program).

For nearly one year (the program officially ran from August 2014 to August 2015) five teenagers, an associate director, and myself spent many hours crowded around a brown laminate wood table in our office—a used-to-be-sales office of a newly gentrified housing development on the corner of Grand and Columbus—in the heart of “The Harbor” (an area I eventually came to know as the epicenter of activism in East Chicago). In fact, our office was located right-a-top of the old Washington High School, a place that the fellows and I came to know as a historic context of the East Chicago Chicanx movement. The demo-home was fitting to the “family” feel that the group eventually developed; I was called “Dad”, the associate director was “Ti-Ti Momo” and the Fellows were our children. We even had a family dog.10

We got to know a great deal about each other. When you spend thousands of hours engaged in work collaboratively, you come to engage together in unique rhythms

---

10 Because we spent so much time together, away from our real families I often, out of necessity, brought my dog to work.
and harmonies—much like the sounds of a band hitting the pocket\textsuperscript{11}—learning how to honor everyone’s authority, knowing when to listen and when to speak, and developing a collaborative work ethic I have yet to experience in any other work setting. We each had our roles within the group, like any family, but most importantly, we “had each other’s backs” (Shawntay, Q1 interview, November 2014). Some days were spent wiping away each other’s tears while others were spent celebrating our successes with our extended families, eating Juve’s famous guacamole and arrachera.

The five Fellows and Meghan, the associate director, all consented to participating in this study by signing an official UIC IRB approved consent form (see Appendix for consent form).

\textbf{Asif: Insider/ Outsider}

I came to this role, as the author of this dissertation, through multiple identities that positioned me as both insider and outsider. This relationship (insider/outsider) not only helped nuance my positionality within the research setting but also in my contribution as a Black researcher to a social science research field. During the data creation and collection phases, my role as executive director helped me to gain access to the setting in ways that position me as an insider. As a Black researcher, I brought certain assets that may have contributed to rich, thick, and honest data from the Fellows. This racialized researcher identity may have also lead to a more culturally relevant analytical framework by which I made sense of the data. Finally, the deep relationships

\textsuperscript{11} Hitting the pocket implies that all members of the band are playing in sync.
that I held with the research participants blurred the lines between traditional researcher/participant boundaries.

I attempted to “work within the hyphens” (Fine, 1998), through these multiple identities, corroding the false binary within positivist research that defines the researcher and the research participants as two separate bodies. More specifically, these multiple identities demonstrate the complex nature of the researcher as insider and/or outsider. By demonstrating the false dualism of being either an insider or outsider researcher, I adopt the stance that, through my multi-layered identities by which I approach this research, I am both an insider and outsider. Fine (1998) writes “when we opt to engage in social struggles with those who have been exploited and subjugated, we work the hyphen, revealing far more about ourselves, and far more about the structuring of ‘othering,’ eroding the fixedness of categories, we and they enter and play with the blurred bounding that proliferate” (p. 135). In many ways I acted as both an insider and outsider to this proposed research study.

My position as executive director of Greenhouse Fellowship helped me to gain an insider’s vantage point to the research setting and the participants of this study. Because this role is hierarchical in its conceptualization, it was philosophically important to me to build deep relationships with the fellows that allowed me access to their worlds in ways that a researcher positioned as an outsider, or superior, may not have had. My work responsibilities may have also contributed to breaking the false binary between the researcher and the researched. We (the Fellows, Meghan, and I) worked together collaboratively in making sense of the world. Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) remind us that, “if we see our participants as those who are in the process of constructing knowledge with us rather than as separate from us, we break down artificial boundaries
or binaries of researcher/subject that have been building over time” (p. 32).

Unknowingly at the time, because the data for this study was being produced as part of the Fellow’s work responsibilities, I was creating an authentic environment of data collection—where the data was not produced for research per se, but was a product related to our collective inquiry into the Fellows’ lived realities.

As a Black researcher, whose racial identity matched four out of five participants, I hold certain racialized relationships and analytical beliefs that matched the researcher participants. “Cross racial research” (Twine, 2000)—where the race of the researcher and the research participants is different—has been critiqued in that 1) “whites are incapable of grasping black realities” (p. 7) and 2) “whites and blacks approach the subject of race with different foci of interest” (p. 7). The concept of “racial matching” (Twine, 2000)—where the race of the researcher and the research participants are the same—has been “considered a better foundation for establishing rapport and more adept interviews because there are dimensions to black experience invisible to the white interviewer/investigator who possesses neither the language nor the cultural equipment either to elicit or understand the experience” (p. 9).

While I may hold racial similarities to most of the research participants I may still have been positioned as, and perceived, as an outsider. I held different age, class, educational, religious, geographical and sexual identities from many of the Fellows. Many of these identity differences may have rendered my racial connection less salient.

Aside from my insider role within the context of the proposed study, I had deep relationships with each of the research participants; I saw them as family before I viewed them as research participants. This relationship, while breaking the traditional/positivist role of the researcher as external to the case, allowed me to live within the research
context. I was privy to information and understandings that a researcher, positioned outside of the query, may not have had access to.

Considering the dialectical nature of the multiple ways I entered, and will enter, this research, there were ways in which I approached this research as an outsider, ways that may have limited my writing and interpretations of the limitations of this research. Joyce Lander (1971) writes, “the relationship between the researcher and his [sic] subjects, by definition, resembles that of the oppressor and the oppressed, because it is the oppressor who defines the problem, the nature of the research, and to some extent, the quality of interaction between him [sic] and his [sic] subjects” (p. vii). Although I attempted to create a shared space, with shared governance, with relevant topics of study, I ultimately, because of my intellectual, age, and organization privileges set the standards, and approved work. This relationship in many ways resembles the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. I made conscious efforts, during my time as executive director, to

stand in political resistance with the oppressed, ready to offer my ways of seeing and theorizing, of making culture, toward that revolutionary effort which seeks to create space where there is unlimited access to pleasure and power of knowing, where transformation is possible. (hooks, 1990, p. 145)

Finally, because of my responsibility to maintain the humanization and love I have for the individuals that allowed me to “research” them, I found it very difficult to write about them in ways that present their limitations, and the limitations of the space, and in ways that may contribute to the deficit narratives of their home town. I worked with the participants to better frame their’, and the context’s, “unfinishedness” (Freire, 1970) to navigate this difficult task.
Data Sources

There were two types of data sources used in this study, archival documents and follow-up interviews with Meghan.

Archival documents.

I used archival documents collected as part of the participants’ work requirements during their one-year employment with Greenhouse Fellowship and three follow-up interviews with the other adult facilitator, Meghan, as data for this research study. “Documents include just about anything in existence prior to the research at hand. Document is the umbrella term that refers to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (Merriam, 2009, p. 139-140). For the purposes of this study, I categorized this archival data in three domains: fellow-created documents, process documents, and public documents (Figure 2). These data sources did not sit in isolation of one another. At times, a data source existed in multiple domains. Data sources came from a variety of platforms including typed and printed, online, audio, and still images.
Figure 2. Archival data sources

**Fellow-Created Documents.**

Fellow-created documents (see Figure 3) were sources of data that the Fellows created themselves. Some of these data sources were created individually where others were created in groups. It should also be noted that some of these data sources were prompted by Meghan and I (i.e., we prompted the Fellows to complete a task) while others emerged from individual or collective inquiries of the Fellows. All of these documents were collected on a weekly basis (unless otherwise noted) and housed in binders—each Fellow had her/his own binder.
The sources of Fellow-created documents include:

- **Daily reflections**: Each Fellow wrote daily (Monday-Friday) reflections of their experiences in and out of work. These ranged anywhere from a few sentences to several pages.

- **Quarterly essays**: On three occasions (February, 2015, May, 2015, and August, 2015) the Fellows wrote more in-depth reflections on “who you are, who are you becoming, and what you need to get there.” The last of these essays was in video format; each fellow created a video using the same prompt as the written version.

- **Fellow biographies**: Upon their hiring in August 2015, each Fellow produced a one-page biography.
• **Current events:** Each Fellow read and recorded their reaction to some form of current event daily (Monday-Friday). These included, but were not limited to, online written news; videos of current happenings locally, nationally, or internationally; newspaper articles.

• **Fellow newsletters:** Each Fellow created 16 typed newsletters that were part of a bi-weekly publication called the Fellow Focus. The content and topic of each newsletter was left completely up to the Fellows and guidelines were collectively established to assist Fellows in the construction of these newsletter (see Appendix for newsletter guidelines).

• **Interviews:** At the start of their employment (August, 2014), once during the mid-point of their year-long employment (November, 2014), and at the end of the employment term (August, 2015) each Fellow participated in an in-depth interview where Meghan and/or I asked them to respond to a series of interview questions (see Appendix for interview protocol). These interviews were recorded, and evaluation rubrics were completed by Meghan and me.

• **Teach Us:** On twelve different occasions, Fellows were required to choose a topic of their liking and teach it to the rest of the group. In preparation for these teaching activities, Fellows were required to create a lesson plan that outlined the topic, its intended purpose, and the details of the lesson. During each Teach Us, Meghan or I took note of each lesson’s: topic, purpose (at times this was interpreted and others it was quoted from the lesson plan), the details of the lesson, the “tangible” (e.g., interactive game, handed out a resource list), and feedback that both the everyone (Meghan, the Fellows, and I) offered at the conclusion of each Teach Us.
• **Impromptu written reflections:** Periodically, Meghan and I requested written reflections of activities that the Fellows participated in. On one occasion it occurred after a viewing a documentary on Grace Lee Boggs, on another, it was requested as feedback on the group’s individual experiences related to being in local schools for a week-long project they were working on.

• **Inquiry to Action Projects:** Throughout the year, Fellows developed and implemented several large projects.¹² Five of these served as data for this research. Every time Fellows worked on a project they were required to complete a “daily project work plan” (see Appendix for “daily work plan” template) that detailed: objectives, accomplishments, preparation questions for their group report outs (an oral dialogue with the entire group), and next steps. Often times, projects required small groups to act as “project leads.” The “daily project work plans” served not only as documentation of the tasks completed but as a precursor to the group report out—a time required at the end of all project work days where project leads shared their progress and questions to be inclusive of the entire groups’ voice and expertise. The five major projects used in this study were:

  o **Transforming East Chicago: A youth survey:** In collaboration with the local university, the Fellows developed, implemented and assessed a survey of almost every East Chicago youth between the sixth and twelfth grade (in and out of school). This resulted in almost 1,500 surveys collected as a part of their study. As a part of the survey implementation,

¹² By large I mean that they required several months of preparation and implementation.
which received its own IRB approval from Indiana University as an approved study, the Fellows developed a week-long “campaign”—which included lunch-time, relationship-building activities and two assemblies—to build closer relationships with their participants. In addition to the daily project work plans, there was an official research report published (Greenhouse Fellowship, 2015).

- **Bringing Opportunities to Our Kids (B.O.O.K):** In an effort to bring more opportunities to the local library system in East Chicago, the Fellows created B.O.O.K (Greenhouse Fellowship, 2015), a proposal to integrate graphic design, cosmetology, and music production into the library’s programming. The proposal was developed in concert with many local high school students (the Fellows led information-gathering sessions at the local high school to better understand the teenagers’ interests) and community members. Prior to officially submitting the proposal to the library’s board of directors at a June, 2015 board meeting, the Fellows led a week-long door knocking campaign in which they walked over 20 miles, knocked on over 1,000 doors and distributed information about their proposal, and collected over 300 signatures from East Chicago residents. Fellow-created data from this project include: daily project work plans submitted, the published report (Greenhouse Fellowship, 2015a) the Fellows created, and materials they created as part of their campaign.

- **East Chicago is ___:** was a community art exhibit that hoped to reverse the negative, deficit-based narratives of East Chicago, often part of the public discourse of northwest Indiana. Developed over roughly eight
months, *East Chicago is ___* was created using donated pictures from East Chicago residents and their written narratives about East Chicago. Those images and words were collaged on 15 music stands (each music stand represented the 15 different neighborhoods of East Chicago). The exhibit is permanently housed at a local fitness center (what we came to know as a central location in the community). Daily project work plans served as the only Fellow-created data source for this project.

- **Community Tour:** Over the course of several months, the Fellows developed a community tour of East Chicago. They interviewed community members, explored the city’s historical archives at the local library, and used their own expertise to assemble the stopping points along the tour as well as the description of each location. The tour took visitors, virtually or in-person throughout the city, exploring historical and current locales across the city, symbolizing the city’s complexities.

- **Open Mic:** Once a month, the Fellows turned our office into a performance space for local youth to showcase their rap and poetry talents. This series was brainstormed by the Fellows, in partnership with several community members, as an effort to give youth in East Chicago a free, safe space of expression where they would not be subject to lots of rules and where they could be themselves—the space was led by youth.

**Process Documents.**

Process documents (see Figure 4) were data sources documenting the various processes of the Fellows’ experience in seminar sessions. Most of these artifacts were created by
Meghan and me to document what actions were taking place throughout seminar sessions.

Figure 4. Process documents

- **Seminar document**: During every seminar session, Meghan or I were responsible for documenting the activities that took place. The seminar log was divided into six categories: date, topic, facilitator, objectives, outcomes, and skills developed. The seminar log was typed and stored on Google Drive. At the conclusion of the year this document was printed out for future reference.

- **Posters from seminars**: During seminar, notes were scribed on large poster paper. At times these notes were written by the Meghan and me, and at other times the Fellows wrote them. These posters were often used to capture group processes during seminar sessions. They were helpful in supporting emergent themes from other data sources. Over 50 of these posters were saved and organized by project-type.
• **Informal audio recordings:** Throughout the year I felt prompted, usually because I thought the dialogue taking place was stimulating, to use the audio-recording app on my cellular phone to record our group conversations. There were 18 of these audio recordings in total. I always asked for permission from the youth to start recording, and the phone was always stationed in plain sight.

• **Pictures:** Several hundred pictures were taken of the Fellows performing a variety of activities. These were primarily used to post on the organization’s social media sites, but they also served to memorialize the work of the Fellows.

**Public Documents.**

Public documents (see Figure 5) are public, or outsider, interpretations of the Fellows, their work, or the organization. Most of these data sources are public documents available online.

---

*Figure 5. Public documents*
• **News reporting:** On at least five different occasions, northwest Indiana news outlets published print and video reports of the Fellowship and/or the Fellows.

• **GHF website:** Greenhouse Fellowship’s website had a great deal of information about the organization including: its published mission and vision, its guiding principles, biographical information on the Fellows, publications, partnerships, and work created by the Fellows.

• **GHF social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram):** Greenhouse Fellowship posted content to their Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram pages on an almost a daily basis. A variety of mediums including still images, video, and written text populated the content of each of the social media platforms. Some of these posts were created by the Fellows while others were composed by the associate director.

• **Quotes from guests:** When seminar sessions were facilitated by a guest, Meghan and I asked the guest for a written reflection of their experience. These reflections were stored on the organization’s Google Drive.

• **Quotes from community members:** Occasionally East Chicago community members offered unsolicited feedback of the Fellows, their work, or the organization. These quotes were recorded in a word document and housed on the organization’s Google Drive.

**Follow-up interviews with Meghan**

I conducted three semi-structured interviews with Meghan between 2016 and 2018. As the only other adult in the setting the entire year, Megan’s insights helped me
to better understand, unpack, and analyze the research questions more thoroughly, particularly the third question of inquiry related to the adult’s role. She served as an additional participant in the verification of the data’s authenticity and I worked with her to make better sense of the themes emergent during data analysis. Because we, Meghan and I, did not keep any sort of reflective evidence of our experience, I found it important for us both to reflect on our experiences together to make better sense of our positionalities, successes, and mistakes as the administrators of Greenhouse Fellowship. This allowed for data to be captured from both Meghan and I, as opposed to solely from Meghan. All three interviews were recorded using an audio recording device.

**Data Analysis**

Interpreting the data consisted of two descriptive and interpretive tasks: coding and analysis. Merriam (1998) defined analysis as “the process of making sense out of all the data. And making sense involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read—it is the process of meaning-making” (p. 178). Termed as the “stuff of analysis” (Miles & Huberman, 2004), codes are defined as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). Data analysis in this proposed study went beyond “pure description” (Goetz & Lecompte, 1984) moving, I hope, into theorizing and generalizing domains.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Again here, like mentioned before, this research represents a refusal of positivist research language and discourse. The terms theorizing and generalizing are used in the interpretive sense. I acknowledge that any theories or generalizations that emerge out of this study are of my own interpretations and meaning-making.
Coding and analysis, in this case study, were simultaneous and recursive processes. Separating the two topics in their description can be misleading and is only done so for the purposes of this paper. Coding and analysis represent a reflective and active process where codes developed informed the analysis; and where the analysis informed the development, refining, dismissal, and adding of codes.

**Coding.**

Coding in this study was both a “reduction and complication” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) of the archival documents at hand. Coding served as a process to reduce the amount of data I had into “simple, broad analytic categories” (p. 28) and as a process to complicate the data sources. “Coding. . . [was] actually about going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks” (p. 30). Coding for this dissertation took place in three stages: coding that occurred during my experience as a participant in the research setting, coding using “First Cycle coding methods” (Saldaña, 2009), and coding using “second cycle coding methods” (Saldaña, 2009).

During my experience as executive director of Greenhouse Fellowship, I used “exploratory coding methods” (Saldaña, 2009) unknowingly as I was making real-time observations of, and within, the Fellowship. Meghan and I developed “provisional codes” (Saldaña, 2009), “researcher generated codes based on what. . . might appear in the data” (p. 118) when we were making sense of the Fellows’ emerging identities and

---

14 Saldaña (2009) mentions two phases of coding methods, “First Cycle” and “Second Cycle”. First Cycle methods are “processes that happen during the initial coding of data” (p. 45) and Second Cycle methods are “advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through First Cycle methods” (p. 147).
again when I wrote a paper (Wilson, 2016) on the early agentic transformation of the Fellows during our year together. These early codes, both in concept and more formally when I created codes to publish the paper, are examples of coding that took place through my experience as executive director, and participant, in the research setting. These preliminary hunches and experiences had an influence on the coding that took place as part of this dissertation—it would be naïve to attempt to separate the two identities (executive director and researcher exploring artifacts).

Before conducting initial coding, what Saldaña (2009) refers to as “First Cycle coding,” I organized all artifacts into a case record (Patton, 1980), transcribed all audio interviews, de-identified all data sources, and uploaded all artifacts into Dedoose (data retrieval software). It should be noted here that I attempted to leave the written statements from the participants exactly how they were (even if grammatically incorrect). I also attempted to translate (exactly) the enunciations from audio interviews within transcriptions.

To develop initial codes in Dedoose I employed “elemental” (Saldaña, 2009) and “affective” (Saldaña, 2009) coding methods. “Descriptive codes” (Saldaña, 2009) and “process codes” (Saldaña, 2009) were used to highlight topics and actions in the data. “Emotion codes” (Saldaña, 2009) and “value codes” (Saldaña, 2009) illuminated feelings, values, beliefs, and attitudes in the data.

During subsequent coding passes through the data, what Saldaña (2009) called “Second Cycle coding,” my goal was “to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organizational from [my] array of First Cycle codes” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 149). Pattern codes are “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of
material into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis. They are a set of meta-codes” (p. 69). Pattern codes were developed during “Second Cycle coding” (Saldaña, 2009) through two processes: “interacting with the data…creating a number of subcategories and using them to segment the data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 36); and “breaking down the more general themes of coding into more specific and detailed codes” (p. 37). These two processes led to a meaningful analytical process that moved beyond a pure description of the case.

**Analysis of the coded data.**

Data analysis for this study occurred to make deeper connections between the data and the context of the study, to affirm and nuance my “hunches” as a researcher, and to develop emergent themes—patterns—that eventually formed the contents of this dissertation. Like the coding section that precedes, I categorized data analysis for this study in two phases: analysis that occurred during my experience in the Fellowship and analysis that occurred during the two coding stages.

Initial analysis for this dissertation occurred during my experiences as executive director at the research setting. Because I entered into this work initially as a participant, not a formal researcher, I was, as executive director, developing ideas, hunches, questions, and inquiries into the Fellows and the Fellowship as part of job and my identity as an educator. Every week, Meghan and I read and responded to each of the Fellows’ weekly submissions (which included daily reflections, current events logs, and newsletter entries). These reflections alongside dialogue with the Fellows, with Meghan, and in solitude provided me additional real-time analytical space to reflect on the
Fellows, my role as executive director, and our role in reading and (re)writing the world together.

I take the position that as a human being, and actor on the world, I am always engaged in praxis. This constant reflection and action on my world was a part of my identity going into the Fellowship and certainly influenced what I believed to be true about my experience (as a researcher). Merriam (1998) wrote, “the final product of a case study is shaped by the data that are collected and the analyst that accompanies the entire process” (p. 124). The real time analysis that occurred because of my participation in the research setting contributed to the findings presented here—my experiences during the data collection influenced this research.

I used memo writing (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 72) during the two cycles of coding presented earlier, as a form of data analysis to extract themes and make sense of the coded data I collected. These memos served as “thematic narratives” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.170) that “incorporate[d] several analytic themes or concepts linked by a common topic” (p.170). Because of the large amount of data used in this study, memo writing became a useful organizational tool of analysis. I wrote memos to make sense of single artifacts and of multiple artifacts across multiple themes.

As I transcribed data and reviewed artifacts for the case record (Patton, 1980), I wrote memos about my early hunches, questions I had, and points to revisit during coding. Each artifact in the case record had an associated memo.

During the first cycle of coding, when I imported artifacts into Dedoose and coded the data using elemental and affective coding methods (Saldaña, 2009), I created additional memos for each artifact. Similar to the first set of memos, I wrote down my early hunches, questions I had, and points to revisit during future passes of coding.
During the second cycle of coding, where I attempted to match singular data points across a theme, I created memos in two situations. I wrote a memo for groups of artifacts at one point in time (e.g., a memo on the Fellows’ perceptions of trauma using reflections, interviews, and the seminar document after a guest speaker visited the office) and I wrote memos on each Fellow’s agency development across the span of the entire year (e.g., Jaylah’s agency development and transformation throughout of the entire year using multiple codes from multiple artifacts).

Memo writing assisted in the triangulation (Merriam, 1998) of findings across emergent themes, my theoretical framework, and my experiences as a participant in the research setting (Figure 6). They helped me to “formalize and systematize” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) the interpretations and meaning-making I present in this dissertation.

![Figure 6. Multiple source process](image-url)
Validity, Reliability, and Ethics

Constructivism takes the position that there are multiple “versions of knowledge” (Merriam, 1998, p. 146) because knowledge is the result of a “construction between the knower and the known” (p. 146). Concepts of validity and reliability, in the positivistic sense, do not fit within this situated epistemological stance. Patti Lather (2003) highlighted this when she wrote

Feminist research, neo-marxist critical ethnography, and Freirian ‘empowering’ research all stand in opposition to prevailing scientific norms through their ‘transformative agendas’ and their concern with research as praxis. Each argues that scientific ‘neutrality’ and ‘objectivity’ serve to mystify the inherently ideological nature of research in the human sciences and to legitimate privilege based on class, race, and gender. (p. 186)

While there has been no formulaic response from post-positivists pointing to an agreed-upon method, this research uses processes suggested by indigenous research scholars and the work of Patti Lather to produce findings that “substitute explicit interests for implicit ones” (Lather, 2003, p. 186). Rather than judging this research based on its reproductive or objective nature, I believe that it should be judged through ethical standards. Instead of using concepts of validity and reliability, I employed ethical standards (Figure 7) that developed findings based on multiple data sources and that forced me to be reflexive in my beliefs, understandings, and interpretations; that built in member checks; and that positioned this research as an emancipatory process for the participants and me (Lather, 2003).
The following ethical considerations replaced the traditional measures of validity and reliability for this study:

- **Using multiple sources to generate findings**: This process, like I previously mentioned, grounded meaning-making through the use of categorized data, the theoretical frameworks that I am employing, and my experiences in and outside of the research context.

- **Reflexivity**: Smith (1999) calls for researchers to be reflexive in their assumptions, positionalities, and the consequences of their research. Reflexivity assisted me in thinking critically about my processes, the relationships I hold to the data, the participants, and the setting, and the quality and richness of my data and analysis (p. 137). This reflexivity also helped me to negotiate the inherent power dynamic that existed between myself—positioned as the researcher and ultimate determiner of the knowledge presenting in the final report—and the participants—positioned as the researched. As the researcher I had the power to “distort, to make

---

*Figure 7. Ethical considerations*
invisible, to overlook, to exaggerate and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgments, and often downright misunderstandings” (p. 176).

- **Member checks:** Member checks, the process of “recycling analysis back through at least a subsample of respondents” (Patti Lather, 2003, p. 191), allowed the research participants the chance to confirm, or not, the findings presented in the final report and the meanings I constructed throughout the coding and analytical phases of the study. The member checks went beyond the participants agreeing or disagreeing with my findings. They, in some ways, acted as pathways to better understand the usefulness of the study for the participants and their communities.

- **Impact on conscientization:** Because this research setting was rooted in Freire’s popular education process, it was intended, in its nature, emancipatory. Other researchers (Lather, 2003; Reason & Rowan, 1981; Brown & Tandon, 1978) have termed this “catalytic validity” and defined it as “the degree to which the research process re-orient, focuses, and energizes participants in what Freire (1993) terms ‘conscientization’” (Lather, 2003, p. 191).

The ethical standards prescribed in the preceding section should be observed as symbiotic relationships of respect. Linda Tuhawai Smith (2008) expanded on this notion of respect when exploring research ethics:

Ethical codes of conduct serve partly the same purpose as the protocols which govern our relationships with each other and with the environment. The term “respect” is consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the
significance of our relationship with humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct. (p. 120)

No amount of regulation can tell me, as a researcher, when my interpretations are damaging to the community in which this research stems from, when they are misrepresentative of the objective realities (Freire, 1970) of the participants, or when they becomes coercive. Only ethical codes of conduct—ones grounded much like the grounding of the Fellowship space itself—can lead this research to be meaningful, impactful, and substantive.

It is my hopes that this research contributes to the dismantling of the traditional, hierarchical relationships between research institutions and the communities they research. It is also my hope that this research is used to move research in a direction that demonstrates how researchers and communities can work together, merging the false dichotomies of traditional objective research roles into ones where communities set research agendas working symbiotically with institutions in ways that benefit their own consciousness and well-being.

**Generalizability**

Positivistic research takes the position that research should be generalizable. That is, all research findings should be replicable. Taking this position implies that “history repeats itself, that what can be learned from past events can generalize to future events” (Erickson, 1986, p. 129). Merriam (1998) reminds us that, “generalizing from a single case. . . makes no sense at all. One selects as case study approach because one wishes to
understand the particular in depth, not because one wants to know what generally is true” (p. 173). Because this proposed research was interpretative in nature, I reject positivistic notions of generalizability. Rather I used Frederick Erickson’s (1986) notion of “concrete universals” and Steve Wilson’s (1979) exploration of “usefulness” of case study research to reconceptualize generalizability in interpretive research.

Erickson (1986) argued “the search [in interpretive research] is not for abstract universals arrived at by statistical generalizations from a sample to a population, but for concrete universals. . . . one discovers universals as maintained concretely and specifically, not in abstraction and generalizability” (p. 130). This research, like Erickson claims, was interested in the discovery of the particular, not the general. It is in the particular—in its relationship to a particular moment, a particular context, and with particular people—that “one discovers universals manifested concretely and specifically” (p. 130). By searching for concrete universals in the data, I was able to locate the “local and non-local forms of social organization and culture related to the activities of specific persons in making choices and conducting social action together” (p. 129).

While this study’s findings may be best suited in an institutional setting, I have hope that they also can assist communities, particularly East Chicago where the study took place, in understanding the relationship between youth agency and community well-being. If they do not find the work useful then it must not be valid (to them), and no statistical analysis can measure this degree of utility.

Wilson (1978) urges other researchers to ensure that research findings get to the “right people” (p. 458). He highlights two points here. One, “that care be taken to identify the proper audiences and to develop arrangements so that the people and the case study get together” (p. 458). Secondly, Wilson (1978) argued that, “we must
communicate information in nonacademic ways” (p. 458). Early on in the research process I found it important to assess this study’s impact by frequently providing the participants snapshots of information, in digestible ways, that allowed them to create value and meaning to their local context.

Because of my unique understanding of the world, including my positionality inside and outside of the research, political views, and assumptions, the interpretations of this research are not intended to be replicable verbatim. This work is interpretive; it is based on my own subjective understanding of the objective realities presented in the data. Its findings are unique and only intended to describe the emergent findings and interpretations of a particular context, at a particular moment in time. The reader of this study, based on their interests and local context(s) should find “naturalist generalizations” (Stake, 1976, p. 6). Stake (1976) wrote

naturalist generalizations develop within a person as a result of experience. They form from the tacit knowledge of how things are, why they are, how people feel about them, and how these things are likely to be later on in other places with which the person is familiar. They seldom take the form of predictions but lead regularly to the expectation. They guide action, in fact, they are inseparable from action. (p. 6)

From this it seems that generalizability stems from the relationship the reader builds between the findings of this study, their own lived experience, and the formal and informal theoretical frames through which they interpret reality.
Chapter 4—The limits and pathways to agency in East Chicago: An exploration of contours

I find it important to locate this case study research within its own unique context. Geertz (1973b), in describing the connection between society and human character, wrote, “our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are, like our nervous system itself, cultural products—products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities, and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless” (p. 50). Conscientization does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is linked to the structural conditions, and local nuances, that shape the process.

Freire (1970) reminds us, “the starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people” (p. 95). Researchers should give consideration to understanding the ways in which our claims and analyses are bound to the structures and specificities of the research settings we work in.

What are contours?

Broad structures of society, what Freire (1970) called “limit situations”, leave imprints on cities like East Chicago. I define contours (see figure 8) as the localized converging points between structures of society and agency. Contours are organic, they are shaped, in real time, by the structures of society and the praxis of people. They are both enabling and constraining to agency development—they can shed light on the histories (past and present) related to people and their agentic possibilities and barriers. People are not passive recipients of oppression, they (re)define contours through praxis.
Characteristics of the contours

For the purposes of this research, contours have four major characteristics.

**Contours represent the local landscapes that shape places and spaces.**

Contours represent the local landscapes that shape places and spaces. Freire (1970) wrote, “Any given society within the broader epochal unit contains. . . its own particular themes, its own limit-situations. . . . These constitute epochal sub-units. (p. 103). In this context, the contour becomes more topographical, representing the local landscapes that shape places and spaces. Here we locate the political, economic, historical, and social relationships that make places and spaces unique. These local landscapes leave a mark on places like East Chicago, but this does not imply that these conditions cannot be changed.
Contours are shaped by the visible and invisible boundaries of the world we live in.

Oppression and resistance, in their many forms, stretch beyond the geographic boundaries of cities like East Chicago. Youth in the 21st century have to navigate systems of racism, sexism, adultism, and materialism (among others). These structures link communities like East Chicago to other communities around the world, helping connect the experiences of people to larger structures in society. Understanding and identifying the boundaries that shape the world youth live in, I argue, is related to their agency development. Freire (1970) wrote, “In order to achieve humanization... is absolutely necessary to surmount the limit-situations in which people are reduced to things” (p. 103).

Contours enable and constrain agency.

Studying the local realities and connecting them to the larger systemic structures of society may support youth agency development. Freire (1970) wrote, “this effort to present significant dimensions of an individual's contextual reality... will make it possible for him [sic] to recognize the interaction of the various components. Meanwhile, the significant dimensions... should be perceived as dimensions of total reality” (p. 103). Contours, in this context, enable and constrain agency. They serve as markers of current boundaries and markers of possibility. The more people know about the contours, the better choices they can make in navigating the complexities of the world.

People can change contours through praxis.

A transformation of the world may occur through the work of popular education and praxis. People’s actions, through their agency, change the structures of oppression in
their lives. As a result, the social, economic, and political conditions of their lives, and the world, are (re)shaped.

Engaging youth in a critical reading and (re)writing of the world is associated with a larger humanizing project. Popular education is an act of liberation that equips oppressed communities with a theory of action. Studying contours supports a recognition of the long-term efforts required to (re)write the world, and the amount of labor required to shift the contours.

In describing the contours of East Chicago, it is my hope that readers will better understand how agency, as it relates to East Chicago, has come to be manifested and evolved over time. The thick description of the historical conditions of oppression and agency in East Chicago that follows is intended to provide readers with an historical framework that can be used to make meaning of data presented in future chapters of this dissertation while also providing examples of the four contour characteristics described.

During the year we spent together, the Fellows, Meghan, seminar guests and I engaged in extensive historical research of East Chicago. We were able to unearth the contours of East Chicago, the localize structural forces that shaped East Chicago and the acts of resistance from the people along the way, through artifact collection and storytelling. The Fellows visited the East Chicago library’s historical collections room to conduct historical investigations into East Chicago’s past, they toured the city with local historians, they interviewed people throughout the neighborhood to hear stories not documented in public archives, they interviewed their parents and families to better understand East Chicago’s rich history, and they (re)wrote the story of East Chicago through the creation of a public art exhibit.
The story presented in the remainder of this chapter is my own (re)telling of the historical research conducted through the Fellowship. While it contains narratives from the Fellows, it is supplemented by my own research. Because data for this dissertation was archival, using data alone for this chapter would present a limited narrative. I conducted extensive historical research, following the Fellowship and preceding the writing of this dissertation, to present a more complete description of the contours of East Chicago. That research is interwoven throughout this chapter.

**An exploration of the historical contours of East Chicago**

Incorporated the same year as the opening of the city’s largest steel mill (1893), East Chicago has always been known as the “Twin City”—with one side being named the Indiana Harbor and the other side as East Chicago (McKinlay, 1988). The Indiana Harbor Shipping Canal and the switching yards of the Indiana Harbor Belt Line Railroad, to this day, serve as the geographical lines of division between the two sides. These transportation pathways in this sense are dialectical. On the one hand they are signs of the city’s relationship to capital—its long-standing history of industrial production. On the other hand, they represent the city’s division, separating communities from each other.

Until the construction of one centralized high school in 1986, one of the few times residents from both sides of town got together was during work in the city’s steel mills. At the time of this study, East Chicago still had two post offices, two libraries, and two grocery stores (to name a few community institutions) within the city’s geographic boundaries, a sign of a city split in two.
Southern and eastern European immigrants populated most of the city’s jobs until the 1920’s. “Most numerous were the Poles; there also were many Serbs, Croats, Slovaks, Rumanians, Italians, Hungarians, and Lithuanians” (Rosales & Simon, 1981, p. 335). During the great steel strike of 1919, where steel workers across the nation walked off the job, steel operations in East Chicago and Lake County continued. Black and Mexican workers from southern states and Chicago, many of whom left their families behind, were hired by the corporations to continue operations (Moore, 1959). Steel companies traveled as far as Texas to recruit and provide transportation for Mexican workers (Taylor, 1932). One Mexican worker from a steel plant in the region was quoted saying, “The companies sent me to get Mexicans to work for them. I got some at Chicago, other at Omaha, Kansas City a few at St. Louis. I even went down to El Paso and some cities in Texas” (Taylor, 1932, p. 117). This tension, between striker and scab, was exacerbated by race and racism.

Because the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had very limited membership at the time of the strike (Needleman, 2003), the union used the moment, and the new rising populations of Blacks and Mexicans coming to East Chicago to increase their membership—although oppressive racial conditions in the union persisted (Moore, 1959; Needleman, 2003; Taylor, 1932).

The 1920’s should be seen as a water-shed moment for East Chicago. On the one hand, it was a moment where Black and Latinx workers could “show organized labor that Negroes [and Latinx] could not be excluded from its ranks forever” (Moore, 1959, p. 524). The period also serves as one of the first explicit examples of racialized conflict within the city. Prior to 1919 (the year of the strike) the Black and Mexican population was small. In 1910, there were only 28 “Negroes” but their population grew to 1,424 in
While it is unknown as to the exact number of Mexicans in East Chicago prior to 1919, “numbers in 1918 were reported to be but twenty or thirty” (Taylor, 1932, p. 52). By 1920 the Mexican population rose to 407 (Taylor, 1932, p. 27) and by 1930 their population grew to 5,343 (Powell, 1959, p. 252). Most were employed by local industry, mainly Inland Steel. Summed together, the Black and Mexican populations only made up 18 percent of the city’s total population (Taylor, 1932, p. 26-61) in 1932. In 2010, the two populations accounted for roughly 94 percent of the city’s total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Hostility towards people of color in East Chicago did not come solely from their roles as strikebreakers; they were compounded by pre-existing racial and cultural prejudices (Rosales & Simon, 1981). For example, there is evidence that lighter-skinned Mexican were chosen over darker-skinned ones for industry jobs (Taylor, 1932). An executive in Taylor’s (1932) study with Mexican employees was quoted as saying, “We took Mexicans in preference to the niggers. Yes, even though the niggers are better workers. A few of our men didn’t want to work next to the Mexicans at first, but that was several years ago” (p. 110). Light-skinned Mexicans were thought to be more acceptable to the white workers, so they were often chosen for positions (Taylor, 1932). “Fights between Mexicans and members of other ethnic groups were frequent; some movie houses maintained segregated seating, and police were often harsh and arbitrary in dealing with the colonia” (Rosales & Simon, 1981, pp. 343-344).

Here we can observe racialization of labor in East Chicago (structural conditions shaping the contour). Racism was not just specific to East Chicago, it was part of the larger structural conditioning of the United States (and world) labor force. Additionally,
the “pre-existing racial and cultural prejudices” in the East Chicago steel mills were not distinct from the larger set of societal values that bound them.

Additionally, here we can observe how racism is localized in East Chicago. This is different than a structural definition of racism, which defines racism as a structure of society. The specifics of East Chicago’s racial history defined the local contours that were shaped from the structural conditions of racism.

Aside from the racially hostile working conditions, housing was another issue for this growing population within the city’s limits. Outside of the neighborhoods constructed for industry managers, the mills in East Chicago provided little in terms of housing for the lower wage-earning majority. The Indiana Harbor, one side of the Twin City, became home to “an increasing number of rural and southern migrants” (Needleman, 2003, p. 40). Because several wealthy land owners owned much of the property in East Chicago, they were able to control rent prices. Tenements and shacks costed much more than the property was worth. Living quarters for unskilled people of color were particularly poor. Research was even used to expand housing segregation. A 1926 study conducted by the University of Chicago suggested that city officials worked to restrict Mexican and Black residents to one side of the city to appease the fleeing white population (Walker, 1926).

The historical impacts of East Chicago’s racial segregation were observable during the time of this study (2014-2015). In fact, the Fellows in many ways demonstrated agency just by accepting the position to be a Fellow, which required them to cross racial boundaries, some for the first time in their lives. During the first couple of weeks of the Fellowship, Juve, a Mexican resident of the Southside neighborhood of East Chicago, admitted that he had never been to the Indiana Harbor before (where our office
was located). Faith, after word spread in her neighborhood, Calumet, about her work in the Harbor, felt a sense of guilt and received public shaming. During an interview with Meghan and me she said

The people that I talk to from Calumet they feel defeated. Ain’t shit finna happen in Calumet, its all for the Harbor. Like Harbor gone look better and we just gone look worse. So, I don’t know. I mean I’m damn near helping the harbor look better and some people act like I’m damn near a sell out to my own hood.

(Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014)

Here, Faith’s narrative demonstrated the long-standing history of division in East Chicago. The narrative also demonstrates her agency—in that she, through all the shame and guilt, accepted a position with Greenhouse Fellowship to support her entire city’s wellbeing, not just one neighborhood.

While the 1920’s were a period of racial hostility towards the growing Latinx and Black populations in East Chicago, these groups were not passive recipients of this oppression. They found ways to exert their agency. Economic freedom, provided through their employment in local industry, opened up development of new cultural pathways for the growing Mexican population. During the 1920’s the Mexican population in East Chicago saw some benefits as a result of their new economic stability—afforded by the financial gains working in the mill. By 1928 there were 67 Mexican commercial establishments, mainly restaurants, barber shops, pool halls, and grocery stores. There were also several news publications, and even one movie theater (Rosales & Simon, 1981, p. 343). Because of the harsh working conditions in the steel mills, Mexican “societies” were created to primarily serve as “mutualistas [community-based aid societies in the U.S. created by Mexican immigrants]. . . dispensing sick benefits of
doctor bills, medicine, and say, $1 per day for a limited number of weeks after the first week of illness” (Taylor, 1932, p. 132). Eight mutualistas were opened between 1924 and 1928 in the Indiana Harbor of East Chicago. In addition to these mutualistas Mexicans used “pool halls, libraries and book stores, houses, churches, and night school classes” (Taylor, 1932, p. 142) to build social and cultural relationships to one another—signs of their agency. These social locations, relics of East Chicago’s past, served as contexts of agency development in East Chicago. Steel workers and their families created and attended cultural locations to engage in an exploration of life in East Chicago.

As East Chicago families reached higher levels of economic stability they organized and made opportunities to create change. Here, the “enabling” features of contours can be observed. People are not passive recipients of oppression. The resources at their disposal to create change were bound to their experiences and the context(s) they engage in. In East Chicago, families of color used funds earned through working in the mills to carry on their cultural practices. The dialectical relationship between structures and agency is exposed here. We observe the structural boundaries that created local conditions and the agency of people to resist those structures of oppression.

Because a majority of the documented histories of Black people in northwest Indiana tend to focus on Gary (a large Black community close to East Chicago), East Chicago Black agency development and their relevant modes of expression are not well documented. However, some of the stories of Black resistance in East Chicago have been documented through interviews. Ruth Needleman (2003) interviewed Black union workers from East Chicago and found that the Black community, like the Mexican community, transformed their deep histories of resistance from the South to their new homes in East Chicago. Facing the same racial conditions that they did in the south,
Black people in East Chicago developed ways to fight against racism and advocate for fair living, working, and educational conditions. Needleman (2003) stated

Garveyism provided the cultural fabric within which migrants were woven into a community. Industrial unionism served as a platform and training ground for black workers who took on increasingly influential positions in local politics and the black community. The NAACP, for example, began with a handful of black professionals and white allies but drew increasingly from the unions for membership and union movement. Steelworker and attorney Louis Caldwell brought the NAACP behind the steelworkers strike of 1919. The East Chicago NAACP chapter was in the hands of USWA Local 1010 and Local 1011 black activists (p. 234).

Communism, although not well documented in the literature, seemed to also be a contributor to the agency of Black steel workers in East Chicago. Needleman (2003) wrote, “Many leading unionists in the early SWOC and USWA years associated closely with the Communist Party because of the party’s success in building [a] working-class organization” (p. 193). The American Communist Party used Black workers to politically organize others in the mills. But they did so carefully—the organizing messages were not necessarily about communism, rather, they related to how an organized labor force could lead to better working conditions and relationships for all union employees.

John Sargent, a steel worker, communist party member, and first Black president of Local 1010, recalls the impact of the party on his activism during the 1930’s and 1940’s saying that he, and other Black steel workers
were fortunate to be caught up in a great movement of the people in this county. . . a movement that. . . changed not only the course of the working man in this county, but also the nature of the relationship between the working man and the Government and between the working man and the boss. (Lynd & Lynd, 1973, pp. 105-106)

The communist party used Black steel workers in an effort to build an organizing base in the steel mills. But the relationship was symbiotic as well. Black workers used the political orientation of the communist party to organize men in the mills to fight against Jim Crow and racism in the mills (Lynd & Lynd, 1973; Needleman, 2003). It is unknown how this relationship impacted Latinx steel workers.

For both Black and Latinx people in East Chicago, the mills can be seen as contexts of agency development. Whether they provided the economic means for people to create cultural places of expression or their unions became ideological spaces of consciousness-raising and political organizing, the mills were spaces where agency for people of color, even though their negative and racialized experiences, was cultivated. This is another example of how contours served as enabling mechanisms that led to a rise in the Black middle class in East Chicago. On the one hand Black steel workers were resisting racism in their jobs. On the other, and through this resistance, they also created pathways to higher wages. The histories of East Chicago steel workers serve as examples of contours being redefined through peoples’ actions.

The great depression tested the resiliency of many of East Chicago’s marginalized populations. Steel production between 1930 and 1932 dropped from 90 percent to 15 percent nationally (Rosales & Simon, 1981, p. 344), and East Chicago’s white population used this opportunity to expand hostility towards Mexicans, who during 1928 occupied
almost 30 percent of the jobs at Inland Steel (Taylor, 1932, p. 36). Backed by the American Legion Club of East Chicago and the North Township Trustee’s office, “a coalition of relief officials and civic groups organized a massive repatriation campaign” (Rosales & Simon, 1981, p. 347). In a letter to Secretary of Labor William Doak, American Legion member and leader of repatriation efforts in East Chicago wrote:

Many of the Mexicans who are now residing here to work two or three days a week, some of them more, many of them less, and if an opportunity was given to these folks to return to Mexico, they most certainly grasped that opportunity. By them leaving, our unemployment problem here in this city, and in fact of almost the entire Lake County, would be solved. (Rosales, 2000, p. 102)

This may be one of the first examples of East Chicago’s post-racial rhetoric. Repatriation, when analyzed through the system of racism, becomes racial bias. The grand narrative, used to persuade East Chicagoans to support this stance, was cloaked within the economic crisis. “East Chicago was participating in repatriation for a means of economic stability, not racist dispositions.” The realities of the situation, however, revealed a structure of racism at play.

Between 1929 and 1932, over 1,000 East Chicago Mexican residents were repatriated through this practice. Through this effort and the “self-selected” repatriatization of another 2,000 more removed almost half of East Chicago’s Mexican population. The remaining population, through a decrease in Mexican cultural events and increased isolation from Mexico, took to more assimilative practices as modes of survival (Rosales & Simon, 1981, p. 349).

John Lewis and the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) emerged onto the East Chicago landscape in the 1940s. Inland Steel officially recognized SWOC in
1942, but only after a multi-year fight for the union, including the brutal shooting of over two dozen East Chicago union members during the strike of 1937 and a government declaration that forced the mills to adopt the union. Workers used this opportunity to create better conditions for themselves and others. Minority workers collectivized across the segregated mills through the sharing of grievances. This collectivism was given “added force by resentment over the discriminatory practices that relegated them to the least desirable jobs in the industry” (Rosalas & Simon, 1981, p. 352). When interviewed, one Black steel worker at Inland recalled “There was no fair treatment at Inland. Workers knew they needed protection and we were all organizers. Not staff people. All members were organizers” (Needleman, 2003, p. 43). The mills, and more explicitly, the unions, became the driving force for the cultivation of agency in East Chicago residents through its membership. They were also the driving force by which Latinos and Black workers could come across differences to build racial unity.

Here we can observe a shift in the contours in East Chicago. People came together, across differences, around a particular moment. This was not perfect, and may not have led to long-term structural shifts in oppression, but it serves as an example of people capturing and seizing the moment for organized politics. John Lewis and SWOC can be seen as the people and organizations that, through their agency, (re)defined, the contours of East Chicago and the world—bringing new analytical frameworks to view society while also engaging in collective resistance to oppressive policies in the workplace and the world.

From 1937 to 1942, when SWOC Local 1010 was not recognized by the other steel companies in East Chicago, workers used direct action to settle many differences between themselves and management. “Local 1010 gained its reputation as the most
militant local, the “red local”, the anti-International local” (Needleman, 2003, p. 45). Aside from its more direct approaches to problem-solving, Local 1010 was a multi-racial organization, both in its membership and its administration. A black steel-bender, Bill Young, was appointed as the chapter’s first Vice-President in 1938. During his tenure with Local 1010, Bill “led the union in establishing fairness as the fundamental union principle” (p. 59). In 1942, SWOC officially changed its named to United Steelworkers of America (USWA). Shortly after this name change, Inland Steel was the first of the Little Steel companies to agree to a union contract with USWA. This contract would, among other things, include “union security and check-off, the daily minimum wage guarantee and a 5 ½ cent an hour wage increase” (“Our History,” nd).

At the end of the Second World War, Black and Latinx veterans returned home to find the democratic conditions they were fighting for abroad absent from their post-war lives in East Chicago. Working conditions at the mills were sub-par and people of color, for the most part, could only occupy entry-level positions. When they started to occupy jobs reserved for white workers, there was rebellion. For example, in 1948 when a Black man was hired as Youngstown Steel’s (the East Chicago location) first black switchmen “white switchmen on the railroad in the transportation department organized a strike” (Needleman, 2003, p. 125) against the hiring.

While the unions represented a pathway of agency development for all workers, Black and Latinx union members had to come to these terms through their own racialized analysis. They had to understand that the union was not free of racism, but a step in the direction towards creating the conditions by which to tackle racism. Unions in East Chicago served as the driving force to collectivize steel workers across race. This coupled with a radical ideology from the communist party, led to changes in working
conditions (mainly through Black and Brown leadership and managerial positions) and new historical markers of activism.

A surge of Puerto Rican workers came to East Chicago in the late 1940s. This new ethnic group built its own cultural stronghold in the city. They, along with other ethnic groups, helped East Chicago steel manufacturing reach its height in the 1960’s. Although union activity continued to strengthen the political agency of its workers, national resistance and activism related to race and civil rights of the 1960’s impacted East Chicago as well.

Some East Chicagoans used their agency to obtain political appointment within the city’s municipalities, changing the racial demographics of East Chicago’s political infrastructure. Although these political appointments changed the faces of East Chicago politics, they did not necessarily eliminate racist structures and institutions within the city’s limits.

Throughout the 1960’s, East Chicago’s steel industry was booming. Over 25,000 people were employed at the city’s largest mill, Inland Steel (Northwest Indiana Steel Heritage Project, 2009). The USWA had full union control of Inland and the other mills in the city, the communist party’s ideological presence grew with the population increase, and throughout the United States public movements for civil rights took center stage. This rise in population, along with a national increase in political activism, gave way to new public displays of agency in East Chicago.

The most documented of these cases occurred in 1970 when Latinos in East Chicago demanded better educational opportunities. On September 23, 1970 the vice-principal of Washington High School called Mexicans “lazy and ignorant” (“Latins present demands,” 1970). A few weeks later over 600 Chicanx students at Washington
High School walked out of class, followed by several days of demonstrations and a sit-in at the school’s administrative office. Included in the list of demands presented to the school board during the sit in were: “a bi-lingual study program, a brown studies program at the junior high school and high school levels, textbooks in the elementary grades reflecting contributions to the United State made by Spanish-speaking persons, and bilingual nurses, sociologists and clinical psychologists” (“Latins present demands,” 1970).

This event turned out to be quite meaningful for the Fellowship, as our office was built directly on top of the site of the old Roosevelt High School—the location where the walkouts occurred 40 earlier. The walkouts served as important reminders of the historical legacy of agency that was once part of East Chicago’s social fabric. The walkouts also served as historical markers of motivation for the Fellows as we made attempts to (re)define the contours of East Chicago—attempting to re-write the world. We held the mantra “If it could be done in 1970, it could be done in 2015”.

In 1974, ten years after the Civil Rights Act, USWA signed a Consent Decree with nine steel companies and the federal government. The 1974 Consent Decree was a response from the union for past racial discrimination and unfair hiring and promotional practices. “The Consent Decree facilitated the transfer of black workers out of dead-end sequences. African-Americans hoped it would erase the very idea of a white man’s job. Every integrated steel corporation except for Inland signed on to the agreement” (Needleman, 2003, p. 205). Among other things, the Consent Decree of 1974 allowed Black steelworkers to “transfer into new departments, retain their pay rate for two years, and use their plantwide seniority to bid on higher level jobs” (p. 206). Another Consent Decree took effect in 1975. This increased employment opportunities to bring more
women and minorities into the steel industry. This Consent Decree did not come without backlash. Some whites used the decree to sue under reverse discrimination, re-enforcing the century-long white supremacist and patriarchal under-pinning of Indiana steel work and workers.

By the 1980’s globalization of the steel industry forced many steel mills to scale back operations or close their doors completely. Industrial down-sizing resulted in tens of thousands of lost jobs in East Chicago and a looming economic depression that the city never returned from. “By the mid-1980’s, one half of the Calumet Region steel workers had been eliminated. The union dropped by 50 percent in membership and resources” (Needleman, 2003, p. 209).

These historical conditions (that is, social, political, and economic phenomena) facilitate a more contextualized understanding of East Chicago activism. On the one hand, the steel industry allowed residents of East Chicago economic pathways by which they could move closer to the “American Dream.” However, when examined as an instrument of coloniality and power, the steel industry also represented a supremacist, capitalist machine—a machine that advanced capital accumulation and production over all else. Racism and gender oppression were well documented in the experiences of working-class East Chicagoans, but these oppressive conditions were not passively accepted by these residents. East Chicagoans exercised agency, developed through political education, union organizing mechanisms, and their cultural histories of resistance to create change for themselves and others. Activism throughout the city’s history helped move East Chicago towards a more humanizing environment. But that changed as de-industrialization, and the globalization of the US labor market hit East Chicago.
Following the boom of the steel industry, over the past 30 years, East Chicago has undergone dramatic de-industrialization. What is left are the people whose histories tell stories of resistance and agency, the environmental damage done by the industry to the land, and the forever remaining impact of unionism and its relevant ideological stances. Known now for several decades of political corruption that followed the domestic steel industry’s departure from the city, East Chicago is left with but one question: What is next?

The loss of union jobs in East Chicago drastically impacted not only the organizing mediums of the city, but also the economic capital that funded many cultural exchanges. Bars and restaurants began to empty and close, neighborhoods became depressed, and the “seasoned freedom fighters were not replaced by activists of the same militant caliber” (Needleman, 2003, p. 213). This also resulted in a forever-changed landscape through which East Chicago activists had to navigate. With no unions and fewer radical grassroots organizations, the militant anti-racist activism once raising ideological temperatures in the mills had to be cultivated elsewhere or it would vanish.

Given the absence of political spaces of ideological development, a school system that believed in and engaged in pedagogies of neutrality and post-racial rhetoric, a lack of jobs, and the national discourse promoting the belief that the U.S. is beyond race and racism, East Chicago began to move away from more public facing forms of activism. The picket signs were put away, the bars closed their doors, and East Chicago’s rich cultural history diminished. Activism in East Chicago became a relic of the past; a story to be read in the history books (if at all).

At the time of this study, East Chicago’s population was just under 30,000 residents—with 7 percent of them being “white alone,” 43 percent being “Black or
African American,” and 51 percent being “Hispanic or Latino” (Census, 2010). While the steel mills were fully functional until the 1970’s and employed a great deal of East Chicago residents, many of whom were people of color, only a small percentage of these residents are employed by the steel industry today, which is continually scaling back operations.

The work of Greenhouse Fellowship and the narratives that follow should be seen through the historical contours previously described. These historical conditions, particularly the dialect between the erasure of activism and the legacies of activism left behind in East Chicago for the Fellows, serve as important contours for readers of this research to engage in/with. Greenhouse Fellowship, in many ways, was positioned (by the founders, funders, Fellows, and community) as an organization to answer the question presented earlier: What is next?

Much like the mills, Greenhouse Fellowship was an attempt to embody the histories of agency development, while also providing a much-needed context for youth to develop agency. The Fellowship provided financial incentive and the ideological context of consciousness-raising. Here we observe the point of collision in the contour—where structure meets agency. Greenhouse Fellowship emerged out of the structural and local (topographical) conditions. It provided a context for the Fellows to navigate the terrain of their agency in East Chicago. And through the Fellows’ praxis, provided examples of how contours shift through the praxis of people.

Greenhouse Fellowship became a space that, in many ways, attempted to embody the ideologies of agency in the steel mills. We used popular education methods of story gathering and storytelling, analysis, and action to make sense of the contours of East Chicago. We discovered East Chicago for its beauty (the history, cultural resilience,
historical legacies of activism) and its perils (schooling, post-racial rhetoric, sexism, ageism, erasure of activism, and environmental destruction caused by industry). These promises and perils helped us to construct, dismantle, and (re)develop the local conditions in East Chicago.

**The Fellowship: Reviving what used to be**

As part of their year-long work, the Fellows embarked on several major projects, or campaigns, that exemplify (a) how the Fellows defined structural conditions of their lives, (b) the malleability of the contours through praxis, and (c) a question we grappled with all year together: Do we work outside of the system or do we work within the system to create change (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernall, 2001)? This section will explore how the Fellows defined the structural conditions, and local contours, that shaped our work throughout the year we spent together.

**Defining the contours: How did the Fellows make sense of the limit situations in East Chicago?**

Using methodologies of dialogue, interviews with community and family members, historical research in the library’s historical collections, and reading theories that helped them to develop a systemic analysis of the narratives they were discovering and uncovering, the Fellows were able to define how they understood the structural and local boundaries of agency. These boundaries emerged through what they deemed acceptable and unacceptable forms of activism. Experiences in the Fellowship, both conceptual and pragmatic, provided the space for the Fellows to construct these boundaries (and as future sections of this chapter point out, these boundaries were transcended). Understanding the boundaries of their agency, the Fellows were better able
to navigate their actions, while also using them to better prepare to resist authoritarian and oppressive forces of East Chicago.

One example of this can be observed during the Community Tour project. At the start of the year, Meghan and I asked the Fellows to create a community tour of East Chicago that included locations that were assets—strengths of the community—and what we eventually termed “deltas” (the Fellows pushed back on using the word “problems”)—locations that could use improvement. As we travelled from one location to the next on the community tour, we engaged in critical dialogue that (a) illuminated the Fellows’ critical thinking about their neighborhood, (b) provided a context for the Fellows to imagine their role in changing the “deltas,” and (c) exposed them to the histories and herstories of agency and resistance in their city.

After the community tour project, Faith wrote about her experience:

The tour really made me feel like where was something to do to stop the all of the pollution in my city. I really asked myself a bunch of questions because the information raised so many questions within me. I am truly affected because one of the Superfunds [is] in a place that I visit frequently throughout the week. Many people that I care about and love attend First Baptist Church a place where I was born and raised. We have been Congregating to this exact place frequently for the last 107 years. I want to know how many people have been affected, since when did this take place, and what can be done to fix it. (daily reflection, September 16, 2014)

Here Faith made better sense of the structural and local contours that limited agency in her community. After hearing that her community was a super-fund—an EPA...
designation for land that is environmentally unsuitable for human inhabitation—she (a) had a better understanding of the structures that were oppressing her community (environmental damage caused by industry) and (b) was beginning to think about what can be done about it. The environmental destruction to her community represented one of the agentic boundaries in East Chicago. Faith’s relationship to the boundary (environmental destruction to Calumet) heightened her curiosity; she wanted to investigate the boundary more to see “how many people have been effected, when did this take place”. She wrote

> There was so much to be discovered about how the industry treats the places that they pollute. It somewhat made me feel bad for my city but more so was impacted to actually do something about it. I also was kind of embarrassed to discover that my hometown was a Superfund. Like in the Harbor to Calumet rivalry it always was a joke that we had dirty water and to find out that its not just dirt but its oil it kind of made me feel ashamed. (Faith, daily reflection, September 16, 2014)

This investigation helped Faith to continue to define the boundaries of her agency. She used these inquires to determine action, “what can be done to fix it”. The evening after she discovered her community was a “superfund” she wrote

> My next step is to simply tell everyone that I know. As I am informing them though I want to think of a way to have a come to action so that I can present a solution so the people can focus their frustration (Faith, daily reflection, September 16, 2014).
Faith used her new findings to create an infographic, spread her new knowledge to her network of friends and family, and a few years after the Fellowship, organized with other Calumet residents to bring national attention to the superfund site. In this moment, Faith, even if momentarily, shifted the local conditions in East Chicago. She used her knowledge of the structures of oppression impacting people in her community to do something about. She used the local resources available to her to organize her community.

The community tour sheds light on the practices the Fellows, and the Fellowship, engaged in to define the boundaries of their activism. Here, Faith’s exploration of her community led her to define some of the social, political, economic contours that created oppression impacting her life. As she defined the “limit situations” (Freire, 1970) she also conceptualized avenues to change them. Her actions demonstrate her agency. By better understanding the conditions that limited her agency, Faith was able to better navigate how she was going to respond.

**Contours as malleable: redefining the structural boundaries through agency**

This section will explore the ways in which the Fellowship provided the context for the Fellows to transcend the limiting factors of agency in East Chicago. The Fellows engaged in praxis throughout the Fellowship that facilitated a redefining of the boundaries of their agency. They utilized counter-stories, their own experiences and the experiences of others, to re-write and redefine the contours of East Chicago.

**(Re)defining the contours through the praxis.**

*East Chicago is __*, one of the Fellow-created projects, is one example of how the Fellows used local knowledge, what Yosso (2005) refers to as counter-stories of
community and cultural wealth, to facilitate the reversal of deficit narratives of their city—what I claim as one of many attempts, facilitated by the Fellows, to shift the contours that served as limiting markers of agency in East Chicago. What started as a Valentine’s Day campaign to collect people feelings about East Chicago turned into an eight-month long interactive project (see figure 9) that took many different iterations along the way, almost resulting in the project not being completed.

**Figure 9.** East Chicago is ___ artist statement

Throughout the project, the Fellows (and Meghan and I) spent time in supermarkets, the Salvation Army, local parks, and schools collecting narratives from East Chicago residents. Participants were asked to write down their favorite memories of East Chicago on strips of paper. Additionally, the Fellows used social media and the local news outlets to put a call out for East Chicago artifacts—pictures, newspaper
clippings, and other relevant East Chicago memorabilia. On June 28, 2015 the Fellows hosted an event at our office, where local residents gathered and collaged the artifacts and statements onto 14 music stands, one for each neighborhood in East Chicago.

In many ways *East Chicago Is ___* provided an example of how the Fellows changed how they understood the boundaries of agency in East Chicago, and in some cases how they engaged in praxis to change the contours themselves. Faith, during a television interview at the unveiling of the interactive exhibit, said

we wanted to be able to throw away the bad name that we had. [Narratives like]

East Chicago is violent city, and we have lots of crime. We wanted to showcase East Chicago from the citizens’ perspective. I’m fourth generation East Chicagoan, I know its not that bad. So we wanted to prove that, through pictures, through stories, different things like that. We really focus on the rich history, through conversation…Knowledge is just, so great and can bring people together.

Those historical pieces that come from conversation are things that my generation would never even know of. Its much easier to love and take care of a place that you respect because you know what its worth. (NWITimes, June 28, 2015).

This narrative, along with Juve’s soccer game interaction referenced earlier, highlight the potential impact of the counter-story in (re)defining the conditions related to agency in East Chicago. *East Chicago is ___* provided East Chicagoans the outlet to state their own truths; stories of resilience, of collaboration, of love. These stories often sat in contradiction to the mainstream narratives found through a Google search on the city.
Faith’s statement highlighted the value that the counter-story has on fostering agency in youth of dispossessed communities. If young people know their rich histories, and furthermore see their communities as full of assets, what relationship can they begin to build with their community, and their role in shaping it? Now when young people enter into the East Chicago gym, they walk directly past the permanent exhibit—this may have an impact on how they see their city and their role in re-shaping it (see figure 10).

Counter-stories helped the Fellows (re)define and (re)shape the contours of their city. Often positioned as in-need of, rather than assets, educators working with dispossessed communities of color may find counter-stories usefulness in several ways:
(a) they highlight the truths of the people within as opposed to mainstream narratives that are, often times, deficitized assumptions, (b) they can serve as powerful examples for youth, who rarely learn about the assets of their communities in educative settings, and (c) they can provide examples to outsiders of dispossessed communities that highlight local strengths, resistance, community, and love. Juve eloquently captures this summation when he said

I think, like, in times we see all this negativity and people always say, oh, it’s negative. East Chicago is a bad place. Like, no it’s not. You take the time . . . if you take time to talk to other people you say it’s not bad. It’s just how you make it look bad, then it’s going to be bad. And if you’re able to tell the people, hey, take your time. I understand East Chicago. See the places that we seen on the tour and you get a different vibe of East Chicago, like, O.K. we can make this place – East Chicago used to be better. We can get back to the roots and you can do it. Trust me. You can do it. (baseline interview, August, 2014)

When working with youth engaging in popular education methodologies it is important to better understand and articulate the contours that will frame their praxis. It however, it not enough to stop once the contextual limitations have been defined—special attention should be placed on the exploration of possibilities, the cultivation of hope.

Engaging in the dialect of the contours: what’s the relationship between structures and agency?

Throughout the year that Meghan and I worked alongside the Fellows, we frequently had conversations related to how participation the question “do we blow it [the
system] up and start over or do we work within the current systemic conditions to create change”. In reflecting on this idea, I now see that it was not about doing one action over the other, but rather a delicate, well-thought out, and planned navigation of both possibilities. We were, in some cases, simultaneously acting within and outside of the normalized, acceptable, forms of activism.

Conscientization is about both re-imagining and building the world we want to live in, while simultaneously surviving in it in its current state. When the Black Panther Party created their Survival Programs, Huey Newton (1971) related them to a sailor stranded at sea on raft:

It helps him [sic] to sustain himself until he can get completely out of that situation. So the survival programs are not answers or solutions, but they will help us to organize the community around a true analysis and understanding of their situation. When consciousness and understanding is raised to a high level then the community will seize the time and deliver themselves from the boot of their oppressors. (as cited in Morrison, 2009, p. 102-103)

In some ways the Fellowship mirrored the notion from the Black Panther Party’s philosophy supporting a dialectical praxis. The Fellowship was not the solution nor the answer, but rather the vehicle that five youth in East Chicago used to (a) examine their worlds—a world that is often times viewed fatalistically and (b) revealed their ability to rewrite it through praxis—the sort of “questioning” that JJ previously referred to. By defining the contours the Fellows were both defining and redefining the conditions that limited and served as conduits to agency in East Chicago.
The Fellows often times talked about how schools served as robotic and oppressive spaces that limited their imagination and collectivization, and how the Fellowship served as a different education model. The Fellowship became a space where investigation and interrogation were crucial. In doing so, we needed to put our work into the context of East Chicago: a city divided by race, geography, age, and gender. The Fellowship, in many ways, served as the context to recognize and move away from the historical divisions within the city. But how would we re-write the city: blow it up and start over or create change from within? It was not so much about which method we used but when each method was applicable. Shawntay said

Well I feel like. . . we are working within the system. But we’re saying if the system doesn’t work with us then we’ll probably become loud activists. . . In the system activist kind of work by the rules but still get their point across. Like. We were in Chicago with the whole march [referring to a march some of the Fellows participated in with the Lost Voices, a youth activist organization from Ferguson, Missouri] and stuff. It was rules they had like it was a line you couldn’t go past. But I feel like some of them were loud activists because they were like “we don’t care if it was a crime here we going to go right here” and stuff like that. It making a broader statement but then some of them were still standing behind the line and following the rules which are in the system activists. They still follow the rules and stuff that they can’t do. . . It’s loud activists that not in the system. Like “I’m a tear this down. I’m a do this and that”. (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014)

Shawntay distinguished between activist working within the system and those that don’t, what she calls, “loud activists.” Activists working within the system “work by the
rules but still get there point across.” They work within the pre-existing contours of society and their local settings to create change. On the other hand, activists working outside of the system “don’t care” about the consequences, they are committed to activism, by any means necessary. Shawntay went on to describe how the library project, at the time, was an example of working within the system to create change. She said, “with the whole library thing. Like if we wanted to we could of just been like having boycotts and be like “we’re going to do this” instead we’re like trying to work with them instead of against them” (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014).

The Fellows initially participated through acceptable forms of agency in all of their project, acting within the contour’s boundaries. However, as they were met with resistance from the power structure in East Chicago, they were also willing (as the year went on) to engage in acts that went beyond the acceptable forms of activism. After several months of trying to work with the library to create new youth programming that did not work out how they hoped the Fellows resorted to alternative methods that sat outside of the acceptable forms of agency in East Chicago (see Chapter 6).

We needed to survive in the world in all of its complexities; we were not going to be able to create structural change overnight.

Our theory and practice—our praxis—(working within the norms or outside of the norms) developed through deep reflection and dialogue. We thought about what it would take for us to thrive, for us to live free and transform our pain into healing. This took a critical navigation of the world—in ways that kept us alive but also helped us to ask what needed to be done to end our suffering. Freire (1974) wrote
the role of man [sic] was not only to be in the world, but to engage in relations
with the world—that through acts of creation, man [sic] makes cultural reality and
thereby adds to the natural world, which he [sic] did not make. (p. 39)

This statement summarizes the dialect between what Solarzano and Delgado-
Bernal (2001) refer to as “internal” and “external” resistance. It is in the dialectical
relationship that we may be able to locate agency development in youth living in the 21st
century. It is a message of both survival and the recreation of the world. It is through
praxis, the act of reflection and action, that we may be able to better conceptualize this
dialect. Furthermore, youth need tangible processes, much like the ones used in the
fellowship to (a) be able to name their world, to (b) be able to critique the world through
their own systemic analysis, and (b) devise and enact plans that help to dismantle and
reshape oppression in their lives. Juve described this tension when he said

You know we talked about it in here, once you grow up you have blocks, you
know, limitations? When you’re a kid you don’t know no limitations. You just
explore the world. So, it reminded me of the saying ‘there’s no limit to your
creativity’. You can do anything you want. The way we’re set up is that there’s
limitation on what you can and can’t do. (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

**Conclusion**

The Fellowship was a space for the Fellows to wrestle with the limitations and
barriers of the work they engaged in while also providing them the space to explore their
imaginations openly and safely. Throughout the year we spent together, they were
defining and redefining the contours that bound their agency in East Chicago.
For this research study, I have used the term contour to refer to localized convergent points between structures of society the praxis of people that push back, (re)defining the limits of society. Contours function in four capacities: (a) they represent the local landscapes that shape place and spaces, (b) they are bound by the visible and invisible boundaries that shape the world we live in, (c) they enable and constrain agency, and (d) people can change contours.

The Fellows engaged in historical research, interviews, dialogue, and reflection to support our collective understanding of the structural and local boundaries related to agency in East Chicago. Their inquiries and discoveries of the rich histories of East Chicago also cultivated the Fellows conceptualizations of the ways in which they could push against the contours of East Chicago, (re)defining them. East Chicago had a rich history of resistance. The discoveries of those histories provided the Fellows with examples of people, in their city, re-writing the world. Shawntay wrote

I got to talk to my Aunty and my mom about East Chicago before now and they told me a lot of stor[ies]…which made me think about what can I bring to the kids now in East Chicago. How they had activity that that don’t offer now and although there was still violence it was a lot more opportunities to do something else…instead of being on the street and getting into drug and fighting. It also show me how East Chicago change it culture by getting rid of the Puerto Rican parade and just having one parade. I thought a lot about how could we bring the Puerto Rican parade back. (daily reflection, February 2, 2015).

The examples cited throughout this chapter demonstrate the ways in which the Fellows transcended the contours and created new historical markers of agency in East Chicago. Knowing the stories of pain, hope, desire, and struggle helped the Fellows
reimagine their roles in making East Chicago a more just place. The counter-stories they discovered through research—the lives and experiences as told by the people themselves—served as useful tools of inquiry for the Fellows to redefine the city that appeared to be absent of activism. History revealed a close connection between agency and industry. East Chicago steel workers, used financial gains from their employment in the mills to explore and share their community and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). At one point in history, East Chicago had over 67 Mexican establishments—these establishments create space for East Chicago residents to exchange and preserve their cultural histories and to organize. History reveals how race and racism impacted East Chicago over time, and furthermore, what East Chicagoans did to resist. These historical events served as markers the city’ rich activism and the structures of oppression that bound these actions.

To do research without paying close attention to the contours that bound the setting may result in limited observations and analyses. Contours, in the context of East Chicago during the time of this research, facilitated the Fellows move away from fatalism and towards a recognition of their own agency. Researchers and educators can, and should, incorporate processes in their inquiries to better understand and analyze the conditions that impact their work with youth. I hope that others find value in engaging in this level of contextual description and analysis before, during, and after their research endeavors.
Chapter 5 – Praxis of the educator: Teaching and learning in popular education spaces

Reflecting on my role as an educator

At the end of the Fellowship Faith asked Meghan and I to describe our perceptions of what “winning” (Faith, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015) looked like for Greenhouse Fellowship before we started and as the year was ending. The end of the Fellowship was both promising and painful. On the one hand, there were many “wins” to celebrate—we accomplished a lot together. On the other hand, Greenhouse Fellowship, was not able to secure funding to continue the program—the first cohort of Fellows was also the last. My response to Faith was an attempt to retrace the memories of the Fellowship, from when I was made aware of the program to my reflections at its conclusion:

Johari had hit me up like “yo, you should check this out.” He was like “you should apply for the job”. and I was like “really? I don’t know if I’m ready for all that. I don’t know shit about non-profits really,” but what I got really excited about was really to have the opportunity to do work that I had been doing for the last ten years in a space that I had complete control over. Not complete, but essentially nobody could tell me “no. we not going to run that way” or like “no. that Paulo Freire stuff. We’re not going to do that.” Like, it was the opportunity for me to use like everything that I had been working towards and it seemed like the two, the two pathways were exactly the same. Cause I was reading stuff on the website like “oh my god this is what I’ve been thinking about for this time. This is what I’ve been trying to do”. . . Like, working with young people is something that I’ll never stop doing. Like it was powerful. And then, like to answer your
question toward the end. I don’t know if its winning or losing, its . . . a lot of lessons and I think. . . I’ve been struggling with this whole leader question. And I just think, in thinking about my future. . . and maybe it’s like how the world has made me think about myself and what it means to be a leader, or boss, or whatever, like what did I do wrong? . . . It’s just learning a lot. But like, further clarifying my purpose and the purpose of this sort of work and like, what does it, what does leadership means? (Asif, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

The words that I spoke that afternoon shed light on my role as an educator. Although we did not hold the official titles, Meghan and I were educators. We were not just conducting the administrative tasks of a non-profit organization; we were organizing curricula, we were facilitating teaching and learning experiences for the Fellows, we helped illuminate the contours of East Chicago, we developed the grounding philosophy, we created space for the Fellows to own their learning experience.

What I am getting at is educators, no matter how much they share their power with students, have a great deal of decision making responsibility. In this chapter I discuss the role of the educator in popular education contexts by highlighting the experiences Meghan and I had as administrators of Greenhouse Fellowship.

Freire (1970) wrote

From the outset, her [the humanist, revolutionary educator’s] efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His [sic] efforts must be imbued with a profound trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them. (p. 75)
In another publication, Freire (1974), in referring to the role of the educator, wrote, “the educator’s role is fundamentally to enter into dialogue with the illiterate about concrete situations and simply to offer him [sic] the instruments with which he [sic] can teach himself [sic] to read and write” (p. 43).

As the executive and associate directors of Greenhouse Fellowship Meghan and I attempted to put Freire’s pedagogy into practice (see Chapter 2 for a more thorough explanation of popular education). This required Meghan and I to think deeply, both prior to and throughout the Fellowship, about our role in fostering youth agency. When I reflect on my role as an educator at Greenhouse Fellowship, and my experiences as an educator in other popular education settings, I find my description of those responsibilities going far beyond the deliverer of content and assessment. As the rest of this chapter details, Meghan and I had to consider, wrestle with, develop, and implement foundational conditions alongside constructing curriculum and assessments. A large part of this process required extensive and continuous reflection from, and between, Meghan and me.

We had to envisage who we were, who the Fellows were and what we, individually and collectively, were capable of doing. We had to consider what support—academic, professional, and emotional—the Fellows needed from us. And ultimately, Meghan and I had to come to understand what larger purpose the Fellowship had in the world and what methodological approaches could be implemented to meet those desires. It required us to think about what dialogue truly was, and how it fit within the practices of the Fellowship. We needed to consider how we, as an organization were going to (a) engage in a critical reading of the world, and (b) do something about it.
Critical hope: A process not a product

What follows is a six-pillar framework that emerged from my data analysis. I use the term pillar symbolically—pillars, as engineering concepts, are supporting mechanisms of structures. Pillars, in the pedagogical sense, represent supporting mechanisms of teaching and learning. Additionally, because of their load-bearing nature, each pillar is required to keep balance—the absence or de-emphasis of one or more pillars may lead to a collapse. The pillars should not be seen as products, but rather processes of contextual and pedagogical consideration and query.

Combined together, the six pillars represent a Pedagogy of Risk (see Figure 11).

![Figure 11. A pedagogy of risk](image)

Educators that seek to use their classrooms (and other educative spaces) to move in the direction of liberation run risks. They risk punishment, push-out, and burnout (Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall, 2009). But teachers also risk cultivating their students’ agency, so they can make their own decisions, ask questions, think critically, and act on
the world in an effort to make it a more humanizing place. Freire (1998) reminds us that “there is no such thing as freedom without risk” (p. 87).

While risk may be associated with danger, I use the term in this case to describe a more promising alternative—critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Freire, 1992; hooks, 2003). The oppressive conditions that youth of color face in their communities and the ways in which U.S. schools have historically served as sites of indoctrination are not permanent or fixed. Teachers and school administrators have a great deal of influence on how classrooms and schools can be transformed into sites of critical hope—where students recognize their own capacity to re-write their lives and the world. In her book, *Teaching Community* bell hooks (2003) spoke to the power that educators have to create pedagogies of hope:

Educators who dared to study and learn new ways of thinking and teaching so that the work we do does not reinforce systems of domination, of imperialism, racism, sexism or class elitism have created a pedagogy of hope. . . Hopefulness empowers us to continue our work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time. As teachers we enter the classroom with hope. . .

Progressive education, education as the practice of freedom, enables us to confront feeling of loss and restore our sense of connection. It teaches us how to create community (pp. xiv—xv).

Elaborating on hooks (2003), and others, definition of critical hope, Duncan-Andrade (2009) wrote

critical hope rejects the despair of hopelessness and the false hopes of “cheap American optimism.” Critical hope demands a committed and active struggle
against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair. (pp. 185-186)

**A Pedagogy of Risk: The role of the educator in a liberatory setting.**

Much of my role as executive director of Greenhouse Fellowship paralleled my experiences as a classroom teacher. For 16 hours a week, the Fellows, Meghan, and I gathered in our office, engaged in praxis—using investigative methodologies that exposed us to the lived realities of people and helped us to recognize our agency in constructing a more humanizing world. In total, we spent over 1000 hours together, teaching and learning from each other.\(^\text{15}\)

While there is a great deal of literature on each of the pillars presented in the following framework, there is a need for additional empirical research and theoretical exposition on their interconnectedness, relationships with curriculum and instruction development, and integration in both in-school and out-of-school settings. The liberatory educator is one who embodies relationships, love, care, and a thirst for facilitating deep explorations of the world alongside students (Freire, 1998). In my case this meant reconstructing my identity as a liberatory educator—continuously evaluating who I was while also reflecting deeply on the purpose that education could hold, and did hold, for the Fellows as we all moved closer towards conscientization. Because I saw my role as an educator in connection to both the Fellows and the contours of the environment I taught within, my role was constantly shifting and evolving. Deep reflection became the methodological tool that assisted me in unearthing these evolutions and my responsibility

\(^{15}\) This is essentially equivalent to the amount of time self-contained teachers spends with their students in a school year.
to respond to them. Meghan and I had to develop pedagogies that met the needs of the Fellows and their community, not ones that imposed our beliefs on them.

What follows is a presentation of the six pillars of teaching and learning that emerged from the experiences Meghan, the Fellows, and I had at Greenhouse Fellowship. I present the pillars in isolation (with the exception of recognition and responsive) only for the purposes of this research paper. In practice, they overlap and inter-connect. Like I mentioned earlier, each pillar combined to create a pedagogy of risk (see Figure 1).

Each pillar—relationships, relevance, revolution, recognition, responsiveness, and reflection—combines together to create a pedagogical structure wrapped around a specific content of study.

**Pillar 1: Relationships.**

The loss of jobs as a result of globalization and deindustrialization, the endemic nature of racism (i.e., mass incarceration, no study of self in school), and the historical erasure of radical spaces of conscientization impacted the well-being of many families in communities like East Chicago. Communities of color, however, have long used the extended family structure, in and out of schools, to push back against this structural violence (Hill, 1972; Johnson, 2000; Stack, 1975; Staples, 1974; Wilson, 1989). The “It takes a village approach” has been, and remains to be, a tool of communal responsibility in many communities of color across the U.S and the world. I, like the field of cultural anthropology, define these relationships—kin-like familial groups that go beyond traditional normative U.S. family structures—as kinship relationships.

Relationships, within a pedagogy of risk and the Fellowship, were horizontal—where power and authority were distributed in ways that benefited all and maintained the collective sensibility. These horizontal relationships sat in opposition to vertical ones,
which may be driven by hierarchical ideologies of order and control. The relationships between the fellows, Meghan, and I stretched well beyond the traditional student-teacher relationships existent in many classroom spaces. They evolved, over time, into ones that mimicked a familial dynamic. Like I mentioned in Chapter 3, we all had familial titles—I was “Papa Asif”, Meghan was “Ti-Ti Momo” (Ti-Ti = Aunt), and the Fellows were “the children.” JJ said “The biggest thing before Greenhouse was I felt like I lost my family. And I felt like with Greenhouse I gained it back. Even though its not like my actual family, it just a group of people that I could say for a fact love me” (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015). JJ’s statement highlights the value the Fellowship had for her in reclaiming her family. She was sure that we loved her too; the relationship was symbiotic for JJ.

Meghan described the relationships the Fellows, she, and I held with each other when she said:

Just in the way we spoke to each other, the way we supported one another. We weren’t, I mean it wasn’t always happy and positive, but whenever it wasn’t happy and positive we were always there supporting each other. If somebody said something that hurt someone else’s feelings we had a conversation about it. It wasn’t like someone was in trouble, like no one was being punished, we were just reflecting and discussing and we were just supportive of each other. It wasn’t just us supporting the Fellows it was them being there. Like when I was feeling vulnerable about something, or I was confused, or I wasn’t ready to talk about something they would always step in and say “hey, you got this”. (interview, December 22, 2017)
Our work, because we did so much of it in collaboration with one another, required a certain level of trust amongst each other—the sort of trust that comes with dependable familial relationships. We were a family because we depended on each other, we trusted each other, and because we loved each other.

Considering the great amount time young people spend in schools, it may be useful for educators to explore the value of fictive kinship relationships—where teachers and students see themselves as members of an extended family network of support, nourishment, and protection. Kinship relationships, like the ones developed over time in Greenhouse Fellowship, are one major contributor to the cultivation of hope (Ayers, Kumashiro, Meiners, Quinn, & Stovall, 2016; Camangian, 2015; Duncan-Andrade, 2009; hooks, 1981). To build kinship relationships with the Fellows, Meghan and I had to be more than our job descriptions detailed. We had to remove our titles and create spaces and processes for everyone (Meghan, the Fellows, and me) to be themselves, to be vulnerable, to be imaginative, and to be critical.

There was no division of labor in the Fellowship—we all participated. The Fellows were involved in every process of the Fellowship, they had as much say so as Meghan and I in every decision made, from what furniture to put in our office to the curricular direction of our teaching and learning experiences together. They also expected the same from Meghan and me. If they were out in the community door knocking, Meghan and I needed to be there with them. We cleaned together, ate lunch together, read together, learned together, and cried together. As this chapter details, we all learned to recognize and utilize each other’s assets through projects, discussions, and ultimately in our collective agency development.
Kinship relationships in this study were a crucial characteristic of the fellowship. They were ideological in that our praxis was grounded in trust and communal responsibility; they were contextual in that our physical working space was constructed to emphasize exchange over competition; they provided pathways for us to better understand each other’s unique assets and contributions to our work; and, finally, they led to an embodied vulnerability that allowed all of us (youth and adults) to remove our mental armor and name, connect, and heal from our pain. Each of these components will be discussed.

The physical structure of our working environment was conducive to building familial relationships. The Greenhouse Fellowship office, sitting atop of the historic Roosevelt High School was an actual house equipped with bedrooms converted to offices and meeting spaces, a family room with couches, a kitchen that held our food for our family bar-b-ques, and a large living room/family room that hosted many conversations and community events. Our office had no desk, rows, and all spaces were open for anyone’s use. It was an open, manipulative space, conducive for collaboration. The Fellowship’s ideological and physical space provided the contexts for authentic, deep relationships to be developed and maintained.

Deep relationships, like the ones we built in the Fellowship helped us identify and utilize our unique assets. Unfortunately, youth of color (through schooling mechanisms of tracking, testing, and disciplinary practices) are often only viewed in the aggregate. Roughly six months into the fellowship, Juve mentioned the importance of building personal connections with people.

I’ve also learned to hate being defined by numbers, charts, and trends. Trends, numbers, and statistics are not the solutions to everything. I always thought when
you have a personal connection with some else you would take the time to understand them and help them out based [on] your…personal experience.

(Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015)

In an interview I asked Shawntay, “what’s going well with the Fellowship overall?” (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014). She replied

Shawntay: I like our connection. I don’t know. I like the family thing. With the whole fellowship it makes me more comfortable to be open with you guys. I didn’t think it was going to be like that. Thought it was going to be a job. I mean it is a job but its like a job I want to go to.

Asif: So two related questions to that. What is the family thing? Can you describe that for us?


Asif: And that goes for everybody including Morghan and myself?

Shawntay: Yeah. (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014).

At the beginning of the Fellowship Faith told us “I’m not telling you my favorite color, because we work together, we aren’t family”. After a few months into the fellowship we all knew that Faith’s favorite color was “purple”. Through the construction of trusting, kinship relationships “many of us were able to let go [of] the armor and express how we felt” (Shawntay, daily reflection, October 17, 2014). Kinship relationships, in the context of the Fellowship, helped Meghan, the Fellows, and I remove our “armor”—the barriers we put up to limit our vulnerability and pain.

One of the processes we used to build kinship relationships amongst each other was our daily check in and check out processes. Every Monday and Friday (the days we were together in our office), all of us (including Meghan and I), started and ended our
time together by checking in. It started as “PIE’N”, where we shared how we felt physically, intellectually, emotionally, and we shared our needs. Eventually, check-ins and check-outs became a general context for us to share our joy, pain, and hope. JJ, in naming the usefulness of our check-ins, wrote

check in was great like always I still love the fact that we can talk and see how everyone is feeling before we start working. Its really help and maybe just for me because I have a lot going on outside of work and sometimes I need that time to stop and let other know how I really feel. (daily reflection, April 6, 2015)

Check-ins helped us to name our emotional, physical, mental states, and they, like JJ mentioned, facilitated a collectivization of our individual identities. As a process, they helped us to plan, connect our feelings, provided emotional care when we felt defeated or down, and fostered unity amongst the group. Check-ins, as a process, were an important tool in the creation of a context of radical healing (Ginwright, 2010). Meghan and I created a space where the Fellows named their pain. Meghan said

the biggest benefit of reflecting with the Fellows was that we knew where each of them was that day…it gave us a time and dedicated space to know how each of them was kind of feeling emotionally. If they weren’t participating as much we had an understanding and we didn’t push them. You know like in a classroom setting, a lot of times, teachers push students to respond or participate when they’re not really feeling it. And I think having that space for reflection with the Fellows allowed us the ability to pull back the pressure on one of them if they needed it..or increase it if they are feeling really good that day. You know? I think they gave us some context in which we are in relationship to one another. (interview, December 22, 2017)
Like Ginwright (2010a) mentioned, radical healing for youth is a process where they can (a) name their pain, in an effort to (b) connect their pain to others so they do not feel isolated in their experiences, and (c) begin to collectively heal from their pain. Check-ins, and other forms of dialogue used in the Fellowship, provided the context that allowed all of us, not just the Fellows, to name our experiences, connect them, and construct pathways towards healing from the pain we all held.

Building relationships was not an easy task. We had to feel safe enough to remove our armor. Meghan said

People were hesitant to be in relationship with each other because society tells you the way you have to be with your coworkers, the way society tells you have to be with your, um, you know your boss, or even your teacher. The roles were so messy that it was kind of stressful at first to form legitimate or even honest relationships with each other. And I think that’s where a lot of our initial conversations around breaking barriers, about taking off your armor, and that’s where those conversations came from because everybody is told like “this is how you’re supposed to interact with your peers, this is how you’re supposed to interact with your boss”. Like all those previously defined roles were kind of throw out of the window. (interview, December 22, 2017)

Kinship relationships were a crucial pedagogical foundation for the Fellowship. They held value for us in the work we did and in facilitating the identification of our individual authority and contributions to the collective. If communities of teachers and learners do not know each other, and do not trust each other, how can they come together to engage in long term justice-centered work? Juve described our transformation into a family-like environment, but also how difficult the process was for him, when he wrote:
Being part of the Greenhouse family, yes family for that is what my friends including Asif and Meghan have become for me, nonetheless… I know for fact that opening yourself to others isn’t something easy to do. It takes courage to do it, because you have a lot to lose. (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

In November, three months into the Fellowship, Meghan and I rented a house an hour from East Chicago for a weekend. During this weekend retreat, facilitated by an arts educator from Chicago, we set out to develop deeper relationships amongst each other, particularly between the Fellows that lived on opposite ends of the city and between the Fellows and the adults. We did a lot together that weekend—from the cooking to the dialogue, we were collaborating constantly. The retreat served as a major foundation for the deep relationships we needed to engage in our work throughout the year. When I asked Meghan to reflect on the value of the retreat, two years after the conclusion of the Fellowship, she said

I think that was the first time we were super open and exposed, kind of vulnerable things about ourselves to each other. I know that everyone was really emotional about that and I think just having that time to spend together not working on anything but getting to know each other I think was important to lay that foundation. (interview, December 22, 2017)

Relationships in the Fellowship were the foundation of our work together. Without them we would not have accomplished what we did and grown as much as we did.

**Pillar 2: Relevance.**

Bartolomé (1994) reminds us that “unless educational methods are situated in the students’ cultural experiences, students will continue to show difficulty in mastering
content area that is not only alien to their reality, but is often antagonistic toward their culture and lived experiences” (p. 191). Greenhouse Fellowship was rooted in this philosophical stance, both in the ways that Meghan and I introduced new ideas to the Fellows (and vice versa too—but they were able to do this quite naturally for Meghan and I) and the ways in which the Fellows engaged with the community.

Much scholarship on relevance comes from Gay’s (2002) conceptualizations of what she called Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP). CRP is an extension of Ladson-Billings (1995) Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Gay (2002) defined CRP as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly (p. 106).

More recently, researchers and educators (Pirbhai-Illlich, Pete, & Martin, 2017; Sleeter, 2011) have expanded Ladson-Billings’ and Gay’s definitions to include ideas and intersections of “culture, race, racial dominance, colonialism, and systems of oppression” (Pirbhai-Illlich, Pete, & Martin, 2017, p. 17). Contemporary scholarship related to CRP have pushed practitioners to consider the systemic conditions, “notably the systemic violences that continue to pervade westernized education systems, and that have their roots in colonialism” (p. 16) that teachers are either a part of or replicate in their so-called “responsive pedagogies”.

16 While Gay (2002) uses the term “responsive” I find the concepts presented relevant to this section.
What I am borrowing from CRP, and discuss here, is the value of relevance—connecting pedagogy to the lived experiences and frames-of-reference of students (in this case the Fellows). Furthermore, I am attempting to respond to the call from contemporary scholars for educators to be more reflective of their own collusion and reproduction of oppressive practices when developing and facilitating educative projects and activities that utilize their students’ lives and experiences; I address these components in following sections.

During the first month of the Fellowship I brought in a book on the Black Panther Party’s Survival Programs in an effort to provide a historical example of community members supporting the well-being of their own community. Jaylah felt differently—she went home and told her mom about the experience and her mom called our funder to complain about my choice of literature. When I asked Jaylah to go back to her intentions of this stance she said

Um at the time, I think I was just like mean probably. I was just like “what the, what am I learning about them for? There’s no purpose, there’s no Black Panther Party in East Chicago, Indiana”. I was mainly thinking that we need to be trying to fix things, not learn about the Black Panther Party in California like that’s not relevant. (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

Once Jaylah was able to build the connections between the Fellowship and the Black Panther Party’s Survival Programs she located the usefulness in learning about them. She said

I think the Black Panther Party... were there to empower their people and to keep their people safe. And if somebody wasn’t going to do for their people then they were going to do it for them. They were like, “I got you”. And I think that’s kind
of like family to me. Like, cause I know if don’t nobody else got me, my family got me. So I think that’s kinda like the Black Panther Party (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

We could not explore the content (the Black Panther Party’s Survival Programs) without building relevance for Jaylah. What did this topic have to do with her life? Her experience? Her future? When Jaylah said, “that’s kind of like family to me” she is making a connection between the Black Panther Party’s relationship to their community; the same relationship she has with her family. The Black Panther Party, like Jaylah’s relationship to her family, is one of “empowerment” and “safety”. Once Jaylah built this bridge, between her life and the content of the learning experience, she engaged with it and well beyond the requirements.

Jaylah used the study of the Black Panther Party Survival Programs, and other Fellowship experiences, as the catalyst to her own agentic transformation. Relevance, in this case, served as a gateway for further exploration. Freire termed this internal questioning, “epistemological curiosity” (Freire, 1998, p. 32)—the “creative force of the learning process, which encompasses comparison repetition, observation, indomitable doubt, and curiosity not easily satisfied” (p. 32). Without the bridge of relevance, between Jaylah’s experience and the content, her epistemological curiosity was not aroused. Meghan and I, as educators and facilitators of the learning process, had to construct and support opportunities for the Fellows to create connections between their lives and what we were learning.

This situation also sheds light on why educators should be mindful of the ways in which their pedagogies may result in impositional ones, where the teacher is depositing what they deem appropriate into their students. In reflecting on the situation, I draw two
conclusions: (a) that the introduction of the material came at a time where my relationship with Jaylah was not kin-like, and (b) because Jaylah and I had not yet developed a deep relationship of trust and care, her distrust for me personally outweighed her curiosity to explore the Black Panther Party’s survival programs. Once our relationship grew to a point of trust and love, we both could push each other in vulnerable or fearful directions.

When learning experiences in the Fellowship, regardless of who the presenter was, started from a place of relevance they seemed to draw in the Fellows’ curiosity. After a visit from activist and professor, Dave Stovall, Shawntay said

It was very cool having Stovel here. It was just So Weird how he talk[ed] about power and I just did a teach us over power. I think about me researching power [and] it helps me understand exactly where he was coming from and how it works in that system. I would love to talk more about power due to the fact of what I want to be when I am an adult. (daily reflection, May 15, 2015).

In this situation, Shawntay arrived at the study of power with some previous study (experience) related to the content. She wanted to talk more about power saying, “I would love to talk more about power”. The study of power was relevant because it was related to her future career.

As educators, we must commit to the construction of relevant curricular experiences and deep reflection on the ways in which our methodologies and content contribute towards the reproduction and exacerbation of dominance and oppression. During his last interview I asked Juve what it was like to be the only male Fellow in the office he replied
Awwwkkkwwwwaaaaaaard. Yes it was awkward sometimes when they had those dirty conversations and I had to hear everything. I was like “oh yeah. Nah” let’s not do that. So I felt that way at Salvation Army too cause I was the only male there too. So, I kind of had to adapt to a new way and like I couldn’t really talk much cause it was mostly girls and stuff like that. So, nothing really special or weird but they had girl stuff to talk about and I was like “yeah I don’t think I should be hearing this stuff”. (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

Juve’s narrative is one of many instances throughout the Fellowship where both Meghan and I did not challenge his normative language. Meghan and I provided him space to regain his power—I didn’t ask any of the women Fellows about their gender roles within the Fellowship. We could, and should, have used the dialogic situation to create more awareness of the implications of Juve’s statements here. Why did Juve feel awkward around women? Was this a sign of emasculation? Why shouldn’t Juve “be hearing this stuff”? Unfortunately, these questions were never asked. This is one example of the ways in which oppression, more specifically the valuing Juve’s safety over the other women, was replicated by the adults in the Fellowship.

One of the major projects the Fellows completed throughout our year together was a community tour. Meghan and I charged the Fellows with creating a tour of their community that showcased historical and current locations of community and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) while also highlighting locations or moments of historical and current oppression. Because Meghan and I were not from East Chicago, we used the opportunity to position ourselves as learners.

The community tour became a useful method for Meghan, the Fellows, and I to better understanding each other’s starting points. The community tour was as much of a
process as it was a product. In reflecting on her experience during the first community
tour the Fellows led, Faith wrote, “I really asked myself a bunch of questions because the
information raised so many questions within me” (daily reflection, September 16, 2014).
Faith’s quote demonstrates the connection between Faith’s study of her community and
her heightened curiosity.

The community tour became a point of reference that we used for future work. It
sparked the Fellows’ epistemological curiosity, provided Meghan and I with a better
understanding of the community and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) existent in East
Chicago, and helped us all (Meghan, the Fellows, and I) come to see East Chicago as a
place of both opportunity and assets. Learning that our office was the sight of a historical
Chicano walkout, seeing the vast piles of petcoke (a by-product of steel and oil
production) first hand that community residents were organizing to remove, watching
Juve spread his knowledge on the toxic water in East Chicago to his soccer teammates to
better educate his community on their well-being and safety, and hearing stories of the
numerous cultural spaces and events that East Chicago once had, all become artifacts that
illuminated East Chicago as a place of assets, not deficits.

The community tour also demonstrates how the Fellows made things relevant to
Meghan and I as outsiders:

they did it [made things relevant for us] all the time. Even in situations where I
thought I was right and I thought they were incorrect. The more they described or
explained or just talked about the topic, the more I could understand their point of
view and where they were coming from. And I think that led me to drop this right
vs wrong mentality and start understanding my perspective and their perspective.
I think even when we would present topics that didn’t make sense they were
making it relevant for themselves. I think that part, they showed a lot of flexibility and open-mindedness that adults don’t come into spaces with… I think it was after. . .we went into Calumet, walking around knocking on doors. And we had this conversation about my preconceived notions about this [housing] project, as my family would call it. I think because I had such an idea of what a place like that meant, that it was dangerous, whatever white parents teach their white kids about the projects. I explained to them my fear about being in a place like and they broke it down for me beautifully. They asked me what it was that I believed and what made me afraid. We had this conversation about how I could see it in a different light. “this is my home, these are people”. They broke down everything I had learned about this place and what it means. And I don’t even think they realized they were doing it, they were just telling me about their lived experiences. (Meghan, interview, January 15, 2018).

According to Freire (1978) local conditions provide the context for our pedagogical projects. His philosophies ask educators to find ways, both explicit and implicit, to use students’ lives for curriculum development. From the onset, Meghan and I wanted to position the Fellows (and ourselves) in authority, where they could expose Meghan and I to the realities of East Chicago, their home and community. The community tour and Meghan’s experience door-knocking with the Fellows in Calumet are both examples of this positioning of authority where the Fellows were able to showcase their brilliance, teach Meghan and I, learn new skills, and develop new queries.

The mis-timing of the use of the Black Panther Party survival programs and again, Meghan’s door-knocking experience, also serve as examples of how educators should be mindful of the ways in which their pedagogies, regardless of the objectives, may be
impositional and reproductive of existing power structures. To nuance the second point here, we should also be mindful of the relationship between trusting relationships and the exploration of new experiences. Trusting relationships may provide us with the exploratory room, bound by trust, to take our students (and in this case, the Fellows) down new roads of learning. Meghan said

So there’s this struggle in my brain about when is it appropriate to push someone beyond what they are comfortable with in order to get them to a place of better understanding and like personal growth and all of that. Like how do you make it relevant if its something that they are not necessarily interested in doing. Or think that they aren’t interested in. Like after we went (to the library in Chicago) they were all like “this is sweet” (interview, December 22, 2017).

As a final point, relevance is relative; it is always in motion and ever changing. Educators, like Meghan and I did, should constantly re-assess these starting points (both in themselves and their students) throughout their time together with students. What was relevant to the Fellows one day often changed the next.

Educators should be attentive in building bridges for students to connect the object of learning to their lives. This is not to say that every topic of inquiry should have relevance, but inquiry should start from what is known. The educator in this sense, serves as an ideological bridge between what is known (through lived experience) and what unknown material can help students to better understand their experience. In reflecting on relevance as a starting point, not an end point, with Meghan, I said

As educators, we have to be conscious about starting with them [the life experiences of students] but that doesn’t mean you have to be bound with staying with them. . . Like I think about the community tour for example. Like, that was a
project that lasted the entire year essentially. Had we not started with the
community tour what would the Fellowship look like. Because that community
tour helped us to really understand who they were, what they were thinking about,
what ideas that they had and essentially, with Thomas Frank’s and their
community tour, and when Mario took us around, really helping us to think about
those critical questions that we could explore in the future. So, it wasn’t about like
just being bounded by them. Cause remember, like, I remember Faith saying “I
just thought the brown water was the brown water”. Like no big deal. So it’s not
like we stood there with “Oh. There’s the brown water”. We used that as a
catalyst to go beyond and explore (Asif, interview, December 22, 2014).

**Pillar 3: Revolution.**

Like radical social movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s, a revolutionary
pedagogical approach sees schooling and society inextricably linked. A revolutionary
pedagogy “recognizes that local political struggles for self-determination ha[s] to be
connected to a project of class struggle and an incisive critique of capitalism, racism, and
patriarchy” (Darder, 2017, p. 3). The Fellowship evolved into a space where the Fellows
not only developed an analytical framework to “denounce injustice” (Freire, 1998, p. 74)
in their lives and the lives of others but also a space where they “announced a new
utopia” (Freire, 1998, p. 74)—their “dreams for a new society” (Freire, 1998, p. 74). It
was a revolutionary space of teaching and learning. The Fellowship was a space where
we attempted to put Freire’s words into praxis:

One of the basic questions that we need to look at is how to convert merely
rebellious attitudes into revolutionary ones in the process of the radical
transformation of society. Merely rebellious attitudes or actions are insufficient,
though they are an indispensable response to legitimate anger. It is necessary to
go beyond rebellious attitudes to a more radically critical and revolutionary
position. (Freire, 1998, p. 74)

Because I take the position that the youth of this research study are
dispossessed—colonized persons whose histories, traditions, and indigenous cultures
have been stripped and stolen (often through schools)—the context of a revolutionary
pedagogy becomes a space where all participants can reclaim their histories, traditions,
and cultures through the exploration of themselves and their community’s cultural wealth
(Yosso, 2005). In the context of this study, a revolutionary pedagogy was directly
connected to the development of a revolutionary analysis.

Seeing the world through systems allowed us to move away from an
individualized analysis, where individual actions become the markers of truth, to a more
systemic analysis, where individual actions are tied to larger structures within society.
For example, after reading a chapter of The New Jim Crow (2012) and seeing the author,
Michelle Alexander, speak at a local University, Jaylah began to make connections
between mass incarceration, unemployment, and racism:

What I figured out was that when daddy goes to jail for selling drugs mom gets
forced on welfare and welfare doesn't really do too much. It gives you a little
money here and there but you got to figure it out from after that. So the baby,
when the baby gets older it’s like “I’m not finna be struggling” so that baby got to
do illegal stuff because there’s no jobs. And like the illegal thing leads to prison.
And there’s this circle. So that’s what I learned and I guess..I don’t know cause I
don’t want to sound corny or like cheesy but like figuring out how to end that
cycle is another reason why I decided to be in criminal justice I guess (Jaylah, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

Jaylah’s analytical lens shifted here—she moved beyond an individual critique of incarceration—which places all the blame on the “drug dealer”—to an analysis of the systems that create and maintain mass incarceration. Furthermore, this newly developed systemic analysis added to the set(s) of experiences that prompted Jaylah to change her future pathway—moving to post-secondary studies in criminal justice to interrupt the cradle-to-prison nexus.

A revolutionary pedagogy is also an act of reclamation. Schools often serve as the conduits of dispossession—where the mental psyches and physical bodies of youth are harmed. JJ often mentioned how her high school teachers told her she “wouldn’t amount to shit in life” (JJ, personal communication). The Fellowship, through its revolutionary practices of reclamation served as a space for JJ to heal from the traumas she experienced in life and school—reclaiming her brilliance, her beauty, and her agency. Half way through the Fellowship, JJ wrote

Being where I am now is helping me find myself day by day. I no longer let others speak for me I make my own chooses now. I'm not even so much of a hot head I learned how to work within the system to get thing done the correct way. I’m not as much as I was once before scared to speak in front of a crowd of people. The fellowship has show me that the younger generation is as important or maybe every more important then the older generations. from being in the fellowship I finally feel important (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015).

In recent years many schools, education programs, and educators have verbalized social justice, but not necessarily embodied its principles of love, anti-oppression and
liberation. A revolutionary pedagogy is also justice-centered. A recent google search of “social justice teaching” revealed over 7.5 million results (July 29, 2017). Supporting this claim Ayers, Kumashiro, Meiners, Quinn, & Stovall (2016) wrote, “social justice is a popular buzzword in some circles, but it is easily coopted and rendered toothless in many places, and in other places it is lifeless, dead on arrival” (p. 91). A move away from “social justice” teaching towards a “centering of justice becomes more than a rhetorical shift” (p. 91). It is a call for revolutionary educators to embody social justice in everything we do.

Centering justice in the Fellowship meant a lot of things for Meghan, the Fellows, and I. For me, centering justice wasn’t necessarily about “putting it all on the line” (Asif, interview, December 22, 2017), but more so was related to the ways in which our praxis went beyond what was considered normal:

Like the Fellows would always say “damn. You know the Lost Voices, I really appreciate them because they put it all on the line but I’mm not really ready to put it all on the line”. But to like, even to conceptualize revolutionarily. To think. We were breaking so many norms (Asif, interview, December 22, 2015).

We were revolutionary in our praxis because we used the Fellowship as a site to dismantle normalcy, because of the ways in which we acted out of love for one another, and the ways we conceptualized liberation as a communal process led by local concerns and needs. The Fellowship was a unique space; much different than the Fellows’ previous schooling experiences. Meghan said

Nothing like that had ever happened in East Chicago before. Teachers and people that are in charge…they taught a certain way and they weren’t really teaching.

They were transmitting. And I think asking them (the Fellows) what they were
interested in. Getting them to be excited about what they were learning. Like they didn’t even know they were learning because it was something that was happening in their lives. Like this was relevant to them and its such a far cry from what was happening in the schools...I think for the majority of them and for the majority of the time they were in schools they were sitting in a desk listening to their teachers. Like it wasn’t experiential, it wasn’t relevant to them. I mean its just so different from what has ever happened there (interview, December 22, 2017).

When newborn children are born, they are forced to explore a brand-new world—full of new sights, sounds, smells, and feelings. But what happens to this curiosity as children grow older and furthermore, how do schools, and society, serve as mechanisms that strip away inquiry and imagination? Henry Giroux (2013) refers to schools as “dead zones of the imagination”—“anti-public spaces that wage an assault on critical thinking, civic literacy and historical memory. Since the 1980s, schools have increasingly become testing hubs that de-skill teachers and disempower students” (para. 1). A revolutionary pedagogy goes beyond normative conditions of society—it is a pedagogy of imagination, where new boundaries of reality are conceptualized and lived through praxis. The Fellowship became an educative space of reimagination—where we were all able to explore ourselves, each other, and our work in imaginative ways. Speaking to the role of imagination in education contexts, Maxine Greene (1995) wrote

Made aware of [imagination], young people may be moved to exert themselves, to surpass, to transcend...It may be that fundamental to our purposes, finally, will be the achievement of human freedom within a human community. Clearly, that has much to do with our wondering about the future of our world (p. 184).
A revolutionary pedagogy seeks to create active zones of imagination, not indoctrination, where young people and the adults working alongside them, can reshape the conditions of their lives. What began as lots of support from Meghan and I (and each other) to “dream big” and to “not let barriers get in the way of imagination” had to, eventually, get tested in the real world. In this aspect (the Fellowship being bound by the contours of the real world), the Fellows’ imagination was at many times bound to the conditions of the world in which we had to interact. Meghan said

I mean the library is the perfect example because at every turn they were told “no”. I think they (the library board of directors) knew it was a good idea. It was just “I’m not going to be told what to do by a kid. And we can’t take this seriously and spend resources on a program that they just dreamed up because we don’t take kids seriously. And a kid is coming to me and saying “here I think this is how you can improve your programing” is just like threatening to them. Like a paid, salaried, adult didn’t come up with these ideas. That and the fact that there are things they could expose about the way things were being run. (Meghan, interview, December 22, 2017)

Here, Meghan highlights the role of imagination in the fostering of agency. While there were certainly other influences on their role in attempting to revitalize the local library’s programing (mainly them acting on behalf of the community), the Fellows’ imagination allowed them to not be bound by the conditions of what was acceptable of what wasn’t acceptable. They refused take “no” for an answer.

Since the advent of public education in the United States, schools have been used as sorting mechanisms of society (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Gatto, 2003; Watkins, 2001),
where students were/are viewed as empty vessels to be filled with a body of knowledge deemed appropriate by the power elite. Freire (1970) reminds us that

“The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p. 73)

Revolutionary pedagogical approaches, in this sense, can serve as valuable tools for educators resisting oppression and reproduction in schools. In describing the difference between Greenhouse Fellowship’s revolutionary pedagogy and her high school experience rooted in banking methods, Faith said

“Through Greenhouse I’m seeing so much more. The more that I am exposed to, the greater my opportunity becomes in my eyes. If there is something that I can say that Greenhouse has done for me that would be, exposing me to new information. Everyday I learn something completely new. And unlike school I’m giving this information and given the opportunity to explore it or to move past it. For example I’ve learned about the environment, basic government norms, and have done some demographic research. No one told me to study one of these topics for the next few months and do something where someone will judge my performance to tell whether or not I mastered the understanding of it, like they’ve been doing all my life I knew that I didn’t like understand or appreciate that being the way that things just were. I was going with the flow of society but very hesitant. The seldom times where I would question authority I got punished and so I learned to stop questioning. (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015)
Through Faith’s narrative we can make better sense of how, structurally, Greenhouse Fellowship created space for the Fellows to explore, was judgement-free, and allowed for the questioning of authority. The Fellows all shared stories similar to Faith’s, where their previous schooling experiences were negative, rich with silencing and marginalizing discourses. As Chapter 6 will highlight, the Fellowship helped the Fellows, and Meghan and I, transcend those conditioning ideologies. Viewing the Fellowship as a space that set to dismantle the traditional schooling experience can be seen, in itself, an act of revolution as I am defining it.

The revolutionary pedagogies of the Fellowship were steeped in systemic analysis, acts of reclamation, justice centered, and imaginative. They, both ideologically and practically, created a context that may have supported the Fellows movement away from oppression and towards humanization and liberation; what Freire refers to as conscientization (1970). A revolutionary pedagogy is a move away from banking methodologies represented in schools like the one Faith described and a move closer towards a pedagogy that values an exploration of the world in an effort to re-write it. According to Freire (1970), a revolutionary pedagogy, what he called a problem-posing pedagogy, of the oppressed affirms women and men as beings who transcend themselves, who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking at the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are so that they can more wisely build the future. (p. 84)

Revolutionary teaching and learning experiences may create conditions for young people to examine their lives and support them in doing something about the conditions that create harm in their community. A revolutionary pedagogy is built upon deep
solidarity relationships with the people we work alongside and uses their lived realities as educative content of exploration. It is critical, is an act of reclamation, is justice centered, and is imaginative. Together these revolutionary characteristics may assist educators in creating spaces of liberation that allow students to recognize their agency and that empower youth, and the adults around them, to collaboratively re-create the world they live in.

**Pillar 4 and Pillar 5: Recognition and Responsiveness.**

All of the Fellows were youth of color, and most (five of six) were women of color. While these identities can certainly serve as assets, they also serve as markers of oppression and trauma. On different occasions the Fellows said:

I don’t think East Chicago has a lot to offer, but my personal view, I don’t think it offers that many chances for minorities because, if you think about it, all the steel companies here, the questions we ask [are] how many are employed from East Chicago? (Faith, baseline interview, August, 2014)

So it looks like certain adults, they really didn't care what the youth was saying. And that’s why I say its this power struggle between youth and elderly people, now. And I just don’t know if it's the 2014 era or if its really going on or what. (JJ, Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014)

I always believe[d] that the police was always out to help. Not to cause harm to a man or women because of there skin color its so hard to say but there is so much racism still going on I really cant believe it I thought I was living in a world where the racism was gone and out dated. Apparently it’s not going anywhere no

---

17 While I attempted to discuss each of the pillars in isolation, I found it impossible to separate recognition and response. For that reason, I will present Pillars 4 and 5 together.
matter how much time goes by there is always this one person. . . that believe that
I should be picking cotton instead of work in an office building. Based off of that
one person more will join I feel like we/I will never Stop fighting for my right to
feel RIGHT. (JJ, daily reflection, October 27, 2014)

Today it was weird though because we kept almost getting in trouble. Like
security and the guy in the military suit (at the East Chicago High School) all
were being really extra today. But when they saw Mo (Meghan) everything
seemed cool. (Faith, daily reflection, April 27, 2015)

Racism, ageism, and sexism were constant pains in the Fellows’ lives, and served
as limiting acts of their agency. The Fellows said that they did not previously have the
space, at least in a formal school or work setting, to study how these acts influenced their
lives. In fact, because of the individualizing nature of society and schooling, much of the
pain the Fellows’ held was individualized—they blamed themselves, and other
individuals, more than the structures of oppression in society.

Because of the pain we all held and eventually revealed, much of our work was
also about healing. Meghan and I needed to develop processes and experiences that
supported the Fellows’ understanding that they were not the creators of their own, and the
community’s pain. We needed a methodology to support the Fellow’s systemic
analysis—a way for them to shift the individualized blame to oppressive structures in
their world.

According to Ginwright (2010a), “trauma and the inability to heal from it are
significant barriers to academic success, civic participation, and general health and
wellbeing. . . The trauma caused by unimaginable choices, however, can be healed” (p.
54). It is through the process of radical healing—where we named, connected, and
developed processes to heal from our pain—that Meghan and I discovered the importance of recognition and responsiveness in our work. We created these processes primarily through dialogic exchanges that occurred throughout the Fellowship (check-ins, readings, discussion, informal conversations regarding self-care and survival, etc.).

Meghan, especially because of her background in social work and her own dealings with trauma, felt very strongly about supporting the Fellows in the difficult work they were doing:

I think this [the space to heal from trauma] is an area that has been seriously lacking, not just in their lives but in a lot of kids lives. They’re not given the space to live and understand and heal from their trauma and whatever has happened to them in their past. I think the reason is I’ve dealt with a lot of trauma and I needed that space and I never got it. And I just wanted to make sure that this was a place that they could share whatever they needed to share and get the feedback that they needed from us. (Meghan, interview, December 22, 2017)

But Meghan could not respond to the Fellows’, or my needs, if she was not able to identify them:

Without [relationships] how would we one, be comfortable with sharing our vulnerabilities with each other, but also two, know when we needed support from other people. And being able to pick that up like you said earlier, “I saw their frustration and disappointment”. That was something you picked up over time because you knew who they were. (Asif, interview, December 22, 2017)

Creating systemic change takes time—healing the wounds of White supremacist capitalist patriarchy cannot happen overnight, maybe not even over the course of the year. Furthermore, process-driven methodologies, like Freire’s popular education
approach, are not driven by products. With no immediate tangible rewards, Meghan and I developed practices, both public and private, to recognize and honor the successes and pain of the Fellows. Whether they were reflective practices and processes like writing exercises and check-ins, or healing practices like breathing and rest, Meghan and I (and the Fellows as co-creators of the space) constructed contexts and processes to raise awareness of, and respond to each other’s, needs. In her daily reflection JJ wrote about the space created for her to heal saying

Today for the first time and I believe this was the best part about today is the fact that we were able to talk and tell some personal things. Faith and I shared some thing about are fathers. Then we sat down for the first time had time to debrief and become stress free with all the problems and get it off of your chest. (daily reflection, November 24, 2014)

Without creating the much-needed space for JJ to share her experiences how would JJ have dealt with her pain? How would others have recognized JJ’s pain and responded to it? How would she have stopped blaming herself for her pain? In one of her journal entries JJ wrote

I have very low self-esteem, I have since I was very young. I realize that I'm tired of all of the problems that I am dealing with. I hated the fact that I'm in the Carmelite house and it's no different of what I was going through when I was at home with my mother. . . I have to face my own problems. (daily reflection, January 7, 2015)

A pedagogy of recognition and responsiveness (R & R) created a context of care in the Fellowship—where the youth, and the adults working alongside them healed from their pain while also recognizing their ability to determine their lives. Like Pillar 2, these
pillars seek to build upon, and contribute to, previous scholarship on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogies (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995). This research, while not a simple replication of Gay’s (2000) and Ladson-Billings’ (1995) theories, adds a contextualized example to the body of research related to R & R.

R & R, like Ginwright’s (2010) notion of “care” is “facilitated by intergenerational advocacy that challenges negative concepts about black youth and is developed by building a collective racial and cultural identity and sustained by understanding personal challenges as political issues” (p. 76). Meghan said

once we started building those relationships we started reading them, and they were reading each other, and you and I were reflecting and I think that was the basis of the progress that we started to make. (Meghan, interview, December 22, 2017)

She continued

a lot of times I saw their disappointment. . . I think because they were feeling frustrated or feeling like they were falling out of understanding of what was happening or they were like “this is over-whelming”. Just getting that recognition of “I see that this is really hard” or “I see that this sucks”. . . They mostly motivated each other more than either one of us could have. But I think that’s what kept them engaged and motivated because they were getting not just recognition, like praise, for what they were doing but they were getting positive feedback from each other consistently. (Meghan, interview, December 22, 2017)

R & R, in this respect, became a methodology for Meghan, the Fellows, and I to become knowledgeable of each other’s strength and pain, while also responding to those
expressed vulnerabilities. Whether it was verbalized or felt, the community of care we constructed in the Fellowship created space to name, connect, and respond to each other.

R & R in the Fellowship was not solely from adult to Fellow, it occurred in symbiotic ways that benefited everyone in the space. In my review of the data I found three types of recognition: 1) cases of Fellow to Fellow recognition—where the Fellows, with no interaction from Meghan or I recognized each other; 2) cases of Fellow to adult recognition—where Fellows recognized something in Meghan and/or I; and 3) cases of adult to Fellows recognition.

In her last interview, JJ spoke about this fellow-to-fellow recognition:

some of the Fellows would tell me that I’m more powerful than I think I am and…that they look up to me because of situations I’ve been in and how I’m still trying to get things done for me and Damon, without trying to get help. (JJ, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

During her last interview, Shawntay felt the need to recognize the growth that she noticed in Meghan and me saying

In my opinion I’ve seen a lot of growth in both of yall. Indeed, Asif, you were. . . a big old butthole when you started. . . . You were a butthole, we all agreed. It wasn’t just me, but everybody seen change in you. You’re like hella open to everything now. . . . And its like from the beginning from where we started to now, such a big change. You like papa Asif for real. And Meghan, we had a whole talk. And I was like “Meghan you better say something. Speak up”. And I feel like you been doing that. So, to me I’m proud of you guys. You guys changed too. I remember I asked Asif, like “you know you changed” and you was like “no I didn’t”. Yes you did. (Shawntay, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)
During JJ’s last interview I told her
I know this is an interview for you but I can personally say that this would not be the same without you. I wouldn't be the same person without you. This space is um…evolved because of your contribution. And I think one thing that you have to recognize is your brilliance. And what you, what you do bring into every space that you do walk into. And like, think about that on the first day of school. Like what do I bring? How is my brilliance contributing to this space? Cause you are brilliant. You have so many contributions. (Asif, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

Pedagogies of recognition and responsiveness are more than, and build upon, culturally relevant teaching and learning. Responsive pedagogies, like exemplified in the preceding narratives, require educators to go beyond responding to the academic (or job-related in the case of the Fellowship) needs of their students, and include responses to other emergent identities as well. Once we developed kinship relationships with each other, we were able to depend on each other, regardless of the circumstances.

Adults become especially important in recognizing and responding to individual needs of youth when they are navigating the complexities of the world. We were all available for each other when someone had questions, needed help strategizing, or just were not feeling well. Whether they were questions regarding their future college paths, questions about banking, or help getting a meeting set up with the library board, we, through our collective community of support provided insight where others could not.

As much of this dissertation states, the world can be particularly hostile to youth of color. Meghan said
the work that they were doing was so difficult for them. I knew that it was difficult for me and I also knew that they had to be dealing with a lot. Like anytime they did something that was really difficult, or even not so difficult, I made it a point to be like “that was awesome” or “you really did a good job”. Like just giving them that shout out was helpful for them to know that, “at least I’m on the right track”, or “she sees that I’m getting this work” and “maybe I didn’t hit the goal that I wanted to hit but they both are giving me positive feedback” or “the Fellows are there supporting me”. (Meghan, interview, December 22, 2017)

Throughout the Fellowship, Meghan and I reached points of mental and physical exhaustion. We were often the last, behind each other and the Fellows, to recognize and respond to the unhealthy stress we were putting on our bodies. Adults facilitators of emancipatory spaces must be conscious of, and respond to, their own physical and emotional needs. When I asked Meghan how she was responding to her own needs she replied

I think I relied on them a lot. I think if I was recognizing that I was getting overwhelmed. And two, they were so protective. They recognized when we were getting overwhelmed. Like they would tell us, “you need to go for a walk because you’re just being overwhelming”. And I think, that reflecting back to me, was always a catalyst for me to take a step back. So like, relying on each other to recognize that feedback that we needed. Like, we would call them out, “hey, I can tell you’re upset. Take a walk”. I think we did that for each other. (interview, December 22, 2017)

Throughout the Fellowship Meghan and I had to see ourselves as more than directors of Greenhouse Fellowship. Supporting this Meghan said
It wasn’t about my Associate Director role or whatever my duties were at work it was more so about what my relationship was to these people…If I had thought about it from an associate director role I don’t think I would have done a lot of the things that I did. (interview, December 22, 2017)

Deep relationships, formed through our interactions and the processes created in the Fellowship context, led to a deep responsibility to recognize and respond to each other’s strengths and needs. The pedagogies of recognition and response within the Fellowship were symbiotic, the Fellows recognized and responded to each other, to Meghan and I, and we recognized and responded to them and each other. Whether material (needing a ride home because they did not own a car), intellectual (teaching and learning exercises), or emotional (needing to collectively cope with bad news and let downs), the Fellows, Meghan, and I built a collective responsibility of trust and care amongst each other; we depended on each other for the support that we needed.

**Pillar 6: Reflection.**

In Pedagogy of Freedom, Freire (1998) wrote, “there is no teaching without learning” (p. 31) and furthermore that “there is no valid teaching from which there does not emerge something learned” (p. 31). As educators “step back from educational practice” (Freire, 1992, p. 93), they may reveal the reciprocal relationship between theory and action. Freire (1992) wrote, “by taking my distance, I close in on [the object of my curiosity], [it] begins to reveal itself to me” (p. 93). As educators create space for themselves to better understand their roles as educators, they, in return, may create better conditions for their students to teach and learn in.

A pedagogy of risk demands that educators turn inward, considering the ways in which their actions, both explicit and hidden, impact the youth they work alongside.
Critical reflection for the educator, then, becomes an act of epistemological curiosity, where “restless questioning, as movement toward the revelations of something hidden, as a question verbalized or not, as search for clarity, as a moment of attention, suggestion, and vigilance” (Freire, 1998, p. 38) guide our pedagogical praxis.

This inward movement provided Meghan and I with the intellectual space to make sense of our actions and to develop plans for the future. Reflection was an important component that helped all of us, especially Meghan and I, to transform ourselves and our roles as teachers and learners. When asked to describe the ways in which the Fellowship provided her with the reflective space to interrogate her oppressive identities, Meghan responded

the biggest thing for me was my whiteness. I didn’t realize until I had gotten so much feedback from you and the fellows that I had the opportunity to reflect on it. It wasn’t something that came into play for me a lot of times. I think I wasn’t forced to recognize or think about it. In the space, with the Fellows, not at first with them but with you then they eventually did it too, I was forced to think about it and reflect on it, and enforce it. I didn’t realize the depth of its power, with whiteness and race, until I left the space. I had all of that reflection from the year to think in and I was able to see how that power was oppressive to people. I will reflect on that forever—how I interact with people and the world. It didn’t change that much in the moment because I didn’t have time to see it play out. It is probably the biggest lesson I’ve taken from the Fellowship. (Meghan, interview, January 15, 2018)

Deep reflection, both in solitude and collectively (with Meghan, with other colleagues, and with the Fellows) provided the strategic space for the contours (see
Chapter 4) of the Fellowship to evolve. It created the intellectual space that we all
needed to sharpen our systemic understandings and awareness of the world around us
while also providing us the strategic space to develop the next steps of our work.

Meghan said

you can’t be in a type of position like this without committing yourself. . . . it
requires you to be open, honest, it requires you to evaluate yourself all the time.
And without that self-reflection you don’t have an impact at all. (interview,
January 25, 2018)

Reflection can serve as an important tool in moving away from teaching as an act
of transmission to teaching as act of learning. Often times in the Fellowship, tensions
arose because of the ways in which knowledge was transmitted. When adults pushed
ideas on the Fellows, they were often met with resistance. JJ said

Instead of you always going through it like you help the youth, how can the youth
come back and help you? And that’s how I was thinking about it. A lot of
seminars I feel like they’re helpful but a lot of times they aren’t seeking our actual
help. . . . I feel like if you are coming in this space and we’re talking about this
problem or how to fix a problem then it’s a point…but when it's a point when
we’re trying to seek out the youth help why don’t they [adults] accept it
sometimes? That’s the hard thing I have about some of the seminars. (Quarter 1
interview, November, 2014)

However, when ideas were presented as questions, and room was created for the
Fellows (and Meghan and I) to reflect, making sense of the question based on “who you
are and what you believe you offer” (Meghan, interview, December 22, 2017), we
observed collective-meaning making, where the Fellows exercised their agency. JJ captures this when she said

I love our discussions the most. . . the other day I brought up the Ferguson thing and I finally said it like “I’ve been holding this in and I want to say it. I don’t think that it’s right that they’re looting Ferguson from stores”. And then you [Asif] started talking about how you felt about it, “In the past people did things like that and their word got across” and [I] was thinking like “yeah that’s kind of true”. So it’s like the discussions make you think harder. . . its like the discussion keep a deeper meaning. . . I feel like when we have discussions that when the activists come out in all of us. . . we can say its going to be a 15 minute discussion and it goes on for hours. . . like the discussion never ends. And. . . in school, you never had discussions like that. . . in Greenhouse, you like actually get deep into the meaning of why you feel a certain way, and sometimes it gets emotional but its nice. I like the discussion. I wish we could just have a day where we sit and discuss stuff I’m not going to lie. (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014)

One month into the Fellowship, JJ demonstrated, on the one hand, a critique of seminars led by guests that were not “seeking our. . . help”, and on the other hand, an affinity for the “discussions” she was participating in through the Fellowship, saying “that’s when the activist comes out in us”. When the Fellows were in a position of power, where they could speak and be heard (literally and figuratively), they, as JJ said, exercised, agency. Fortunately for Meghan and I, the Fellows expressed this frustration early enough for us to shift. As a result of the Fellows’ reflections, we started to have more intensive preparatory conversations with seminar guests, and amongst ourselves,
that led to more dialogic seminar sessions, where every member of the community was seen as both teacher and learner.

The Fellowship had four grounding values: self, community, theory, and action. Each value had reflective components that created the foundation for our work throughout the year. Here, reflection went beyond the task of the teacher, towards a practice where reflection became a crucial component of all parts of the program, for ourselves and our work. More pragmatically, we required the Fellows to reflect deeply and regularly. They had to write daily reflections, they participated in check-ins every day they were in the office, and all of their projects were developed out of questions they had related to their lived experience.

For Meghan and I, reflection was a part of our daily practice. Whether the Fellows were in the office or not, Meghan started every day with a check-in. In an interview I said

We didn’t call it a check in but we would figure out where each other were in that moment. . . there was a lot of deep reflection on how we deal with the conflicts that were occurring within the Fellowship. (Asif, interview, December 22, 2017)

For Meghan, reflection had a direct impact on her agency. She said

I had a lot of doubt about what I was saying, what I was doing. I relied a lot on you to carry things and I think toward the end I was starting to find my voice. But I was only finding my voice because I was reflecting on what had happened in the group. I was reflecting with you about what I was saying and doing. So for me personally, I was able to take moments and kind of deconstruct them and talk about them with you and kind of reflect on them myself. And throughout the Fellowship I started to become more comfortable in what my contribution was. (Meghan, interview, December 22, 2017)
Having not had much experience working with youth in educative settings, reflection served as a contributive pathway for her exercise her agency in the Fellowship. In her book, *Freire and Education*, Antonia Darder (2015) wrote

For those of us that see our dedication to our labor as educators similarly, this is not a commitment for the faint of heart, but rather one that demands we come to social struggle with a critical awareness that is deeply tied to a critical praxis [reflection and action] that brings a presence of heart, mind, body, and spirit. (p. 126)

Reflection has great value and purpose in any liberatory project, especially for educators facilitating teaching and learning processes within those emancipatory spaces. Meghan, the Fellows, and I used reflective practices to look back on our work and prepare for the future. Reflection was an integral method of the Fellowship; it was both informative and responsive. Meghan and I also used reflection to critique and dismantle our own oppressive tendencies and respond to the needs of the Fellows and the Fellowship. As educators, we should consider the relationship between reflection and action—as both inform our praxis. For without critical reflection, theory, and thus teaching, “becomes simply ‘blah, blah, blah’” (Freire, 1998, p. 30).

**Summary: A pedagogy of risk**

In the case of Greenhouse Fellowship, the six-pillars of the pedagogy of risk served as important foundational tools to develop our questions and methodologies of exploration. I told Meghan

you know, it was through all of these things that we were able to engage in teaching and learning. We did this stuff, not like it happened before we developed content, but it certainly was foundational for our educational experiences in the
Fellowship and the things we did, and the sorts of curricula that you and I developed, and what the fellows developed. And then I argue that like all of this stuff: the experiences, and these six pillars, help foster the Fellow’s agency, or activism. (Asif, interview, December 22, 2017)

The pedagogy of risk, and the six pillars associated with it were crucial to the development of curricular experiences in the Fellowship. Without relationships, we would not have known each other nor the assets that we each brought to the work. Without relevant learning experiences, the Fellows may not have stayed engaged in the Fellowship in the ways they did (and additionally may provide insight on why other Fellows left the program). The Fellowship, void of revolutionary hopes and desires, may have led to a replication of the status quo, a replication of oppression, and Faith may have left the Fellowship continuing to think that the water in her community was supposed to be “brown”. Recognizing and responding to everyone’s unique contributions to the Fellowship, while also recognizing and responding to everyone’s ever-changing needs allowed us to maintain deep relationships, hope, and agency in a real-world that often positions youth in need of, as opposed to, capable and contributive. Finally, reflection provided us the real-time solitary and communal space to better understand the past while planning for the future.

Meghan said

I think the pillars are things we had to intentionally foster in the space. Like they don’t just happen. And I think unless you’re aware of each of these things in any situation where you’re engaging in teaching or learning. Like these things have to be intentionally brought into the space…these are the things we had to have in order for us to get the results that we got. To form the relationships that we
needed to form with them, and with each other. Like, I think that you can’t necessarily have this without these pillars (interview, December 22, 2017).

The six pillars of the pedagogy of risk created a foundation of support, care, love, and authority. The sort of foundation we needed to see each other, and ourselves, as capable and contributive.

**The Interconnections of the Pillars**

As Figure 12 details, the pedagogy of risk is connected in seven ways: it is humanizing, it is about survival, it is non-hierarchical while also being youth centered, it is painful, it is complex, and it is grounded in praxis.

![Figure 12. Interconnections of the Pedagogy of Risk](image)

**A pedagogy of risk is humanizing.**

A pedagogy of risk seeks to alter the ways in which oppression has become normalized in society—what bell hooks (1981) refers to as “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy”. It audaciously seeks to dismantle the conditions that manifest and maintain oppression in communities (Duncan-Andrade, 2009). For the Fellowship, this meant
dissecting our own internalized oppression, and adopting more humanizing pedagogies that put people first. Speaking to the humanizing components of Fellowship, Meghan said:

I think the work of the Fellowship, treating young people as human beings, as participating and integral parts of society, is the definition of social justice. Young people are often silenced, or their opinions are minimized by adults who believe they don’t know how the world works, they shouldn’t get a say in important decisions being made for them and their community. Greenhouse Fellowship actively worked to prove that young people have their own thoughts, ideas, and opinions about the world, especially their own communities, and that when given the opportunity to speak and be heard, society as a whole benefits. (interview, January 15, 2018).

The Fellows embodied humanization too, interpreting its purpose in different ways. As early as September, we started having conversations regarding humanization. Before the Fellows went out to talk to East Chicagoans, we talked about our role in “re-telling stories in respectful, complete ways” (seminar document, September 26, 2015). This conversation led us to start talking about the word “humanization”. We revisited humanization throughout the Fellowship—from reading Freire’s narratives related to the terms to all making a verbal commitment during a seminar session to “humanize each other and the world” (seminar document, March 16, 2015). The following narratives are examples of the Fellows’ embodiment of humanization.

humanizing people, that’s important in all spaces. At first I really didn’t know too much about it but I think that’s one of the most important things is to remember that someone else is a human. And they have feelings. If you care about their
feelings, before you do something or if you do something to them, at least acknowledge the fact that you hurt that person’s feelings. (JJ, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

humanizing people’ like is, it may be because I’m sensitive, that just really opened my eyes cause its like treat people how you want to be treated (Faith, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

the whole humanization thing. And to know even though I still need work on it, I know a lot of people that need to work on humanizing people (Shawntay, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

While they did not call it social justice, their words are connected to building a better world, a more just place for people to live. Seeing ourselves and other people as human allowed us to also better understand and name the human needs of everyone. It also helped us to understand what was limiting people from reaching this human capacity. Social justice was much more than a buzz word for the interactions and the work of Greenhouse Fellowship. It was a way of being—it provided a foundation for all of our interactions.

**A pedagogy of risk is mindful of the needs of survival.**

While justice-centered projects, like Greenhouse Fellowship, believe that our work can lead to the construction of more loving, caring, and less-oppressive world, we should be mindful of the more immediate needs of the youth we work with and ourselves. The Fellowship, itself, provided material resources for the Fellows, Meghan, and I to survive in the world. Material hope “comes from the sense of control young people have when they are given the resources to “deal with the forces that affect their lives” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, p. 186). The $25,000.00 salary provided to the Fellows, along
with the other material resources they received as part of the Fellowship facilitated the Fellows’ immediate needs of survival. The Fellows were able to feed themselves (and their families), buy clothes, and even pay for their own housing in some cases using the bi-weekly paychecks they received through the year.

Those material resources also provided the Fellows with some tools to express their agency. Their salaries provided them with the means to send donations to Ferguson after the death of Michael Brown, pay for a train ride to participate in a protest, send emails and conduct research from the computers we provided them, pay their phone bills that provided the recording devices they used for interviews—these are just a few examples.

Duncan-Andrade (2009) wrote, “an effective teacher is herself a material resource: an indispensable person who can connect schooling to the real, material conditions of life” (p. 187). Meghan and I, as administrators, certainly acted in this capacity, but also in others—we had numerous conversations about life with Fellows, provided rides to and from places, and were on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week to be there when the Fellows needed us.

The Fellows cultivated hope in Meghan and me. They were available for counseling and dialogue when we needed it (Shawntay was our in-house therapist, I called her often to help me with my life’s situations), they purchased items for our well-being (I had a bad habit of not eating), and they helped Meghan and I make connections between content of the Fellowship and its application to East Chicago.

**A pedagogy of risk dismantles hierarchy through solidarity.**

Breaking down hierarchy within the fellowship context required solidarity amongst the Fellows, Meghan, and I. According to hooks (2000a)
Solidarity is not the same as support. To experience solidarity, we must have a community of interests, shared beliefs and goals around which to unite, to build Sisterhood. Support can be occasional. It can be given and just as easily withdrawn. Solidarity requires sustained, ongoing commitment (p. 67).

To build this sort of solidarity with the Fellows, and amongst ourselves, deep kinship relationships (Hill, 1972; Johnson, 2000; Stick, 1975; Wilson, 1989; Yosso, 2005) were built and deep self-reflection occurred—without these two critical components our solidarity may have looked a lot like support (hierarchical and inauthentic). We became a family—a family that knew each other and that could depend on each other, no matter what. This kinship that we developed amongst each other also allowed us to be comfortable in exposing our flaws, our vulnerabilities with each other. Meghan and I named our pain, our faults, our mistakes, and the unknown in front of each other.

During an interview, Meghan recalled the unique relationship between all of us saying the space didn’t necessarily exist for them before we kind of created it together. And that’s the reason I think we were able to set down whatever expectations we had of what the relationship amongst each other, what the relationship between you and I looked like, or between us and the Fellows looked like. And that’s not to say that there weren’t any kinda of norms or roles..I mean there’s always are in relationships but because I think we were building this space together, with the Fellows, they were able to have a say in what that relationship looked like and what made sense for them and what was beneficial to them. (interview, December 22, 2017)
Solidarity meant more than just “having a say” it also meant active membership from everyone. We relied heavily on each other—emotionally, physically, and intellectually. In June (roughly 10 months into the Fellowship) and in July (roughly 11 months into the Fellowships), the Fellows presented at academic conferences in Los Angeles and Oakland, California. These conference presentations, and more importantly the planning for these presentations, serve as demonstrations of our individual authority and contributions to the collective

Meghan: I saw the strongest bond between the fellows when we were planning for the presentation in LA and Oakland. Like, when they had to be super strong together like we all kind of, you know, I think that is when we were most bonded. Like, we had to be on the same page.

Asif: There was something really awesome about the planning, especially for Oakland. Like, it reached a point of frustration, but I think the relationships helped us to identify each other’s assets and so I remember like when it was really kind of down and there was a lot of frustration. And Shawntay, like she normally does, like you know came through and helped to shift the conversation and came up with that knomuduction thing. And what she did sparked other folks to get back in, re-engaged. So um. I think about that a lot.

Meghan: That was so hard for them, but I think prepping for LA was the initial struggle for them to figure out how to be together. Not just them but for us to. Like how do connect all of their abilities and their talents and their own wisdom into a collective voice. And that was the defining moment of the Fellowship,

knowledge, communication, and production. A term Shawntay coined to discuss the Fellowship’s connection with the East Chicago youth.
because we had been working all year on trying to get them, and us really, to unify their voices. Not in a way that downplays their individual strengths but in a way that they’re more powerful together. And it was so hard to get to that point but I think LA, like prepping for these conferences, kind of broke us down and then helped us build back up from a place of more like support for one another and strength together I guess. (interview, December 22, 2017)

**A pedagogy of risk is connected to students’ lives.**

Building curricular experiences rooted in students’ lived realities may help students to make the connections between education and their communities. Furthermore, schools and classrooms could potentially serve as contexts where students not only learn about their lives, but they can also serve as spaces where students develop the skills and capacities to do something about their communities (praxis). This shifts the traditional nature of U.S. schooling—removing the indoctrinating components and developing an ethos of wellness for one’s self and one’s community. Youth of color in poor communities are often told (by adults) that “making it” means leaving your community, using school as an outlet to gain skills that will allow one to escape poverty. But what if classrooms, teachers, and schools became places where students could reconceptualize “making it”—considering ways in which the skills of school can be used to make their communities healthier?

Every experience in the Fellowship was related to the Fellows’ lived experiences and their community. Part of our role as the adult facilitators, and the Fellows’ when they led teaching and learning experiences, was making the experience relevant to each other and to our work. Because we were not bound by objectives set forth by an
institutional structure, our objectives and goals were developed out of our exploration and collaboration with the community of East Chicago.

A pedagogy of risk is painful.

One of the first things we (the Fellows, Meghan, and I) did when we got into our office at the start of the Fellowship was paint a quote on the wall. It read “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Socrates, nd). We used this quote as one of our guiding principles—engaging in a constant reading of the world in an effort to re-write it. This Socratic process “requires both teachers and students to painfully examine our lives and actions within an unjust society and to share the sensibility that pain may pave the path to justice” (Duncan-Andrade, 2009, pp 187-188).

Pedagogically, the examination of our lives required Meghan and me as the “teachers” to (a) agitate the Fellows to “become more unsettled about the social conditions, ideology, and social practice that shape their experiences” (Camangian, 2015, p. 436), (b) arouse them by “guiding them to learn more about their state of being unsettled” (p, 436), and (c) inspire them to “understand and awaken the collective consciousness of others with analysis that appeals to the moral dispositions of their listeners” (p. 443). Meghan and I aspired to embrace and actualize Camangian’s (2015) framework in the context of the fellowship—agitating the Fellows’ awareness of their lives, arousing their epistemological curiosities, and inspiring them to take action.

While “the unexamined life may not be worth living”, Malcolm X reminds us that “the examined life is painful” (West, 2001). Examining our lives in the Fellowship, like Malcolm X said, was a painful process because it often times brought up moments of trauma—especially as the Fellows began to recognize that their pain was associated with a larger structure outside of themselves. Bringing up their trauma also created situations
to reduce the pain. At times, this pain was turned into agency. Sometimes healing from pain meant a talk with the group during check-in or a walk down the block. In other instances, it resulted in multi-month long organizing projects.

Meghan, the Fellows, and I had to consider how trauma informed the Fellowship’s pedagogy. We had to think about what healing meant within the context of the Fellowship. We all needed to heal from our first-hand trauma (trauma that we experienced directly) and secondhand trauma (trauma developed from hearing about others’ trauma). To do this we adopted Ginwright’s (2010) radical healing framework (see Chapter 2). This radical healing framework pushed us to consider how the Fellowship was a space to name our pain, connect our pain to the pain of others (to realize that we are not alone in our struggle), and begin to heal from that pain. Half way through the year, JJ made mention of how the Fellowship helped her heal writing

By working with the fellowship I finally founded myself. I don't see myself floating with no thought in the world on who JJ really is. I'm finally found myself happy and more important I finally feel like I can trust people. (JJ, Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015)

Juve, also made connections between the fellowship and healing. When asked how the Fellowship set him on a path to healing he responded

I don’t know. I guess by…giving me more knowledge and giving me the opportunity to reflect on myself and what I want and how to get there. I never actually reflected on my life or who I am or where I want to be. So, being granted that opportunity actually made me get that way, or take that path. (Juvé, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)
A pedagogy of risk is complex.

A pedagogy of risk is complex and should be viewed dialectically—while it may be liberatory, it can also be perilous. It illuminates the complexities related to supporting young peoples’ critical reading of the world and maintaining their sense of hope and their agency. A liberatory education is not linear and should not be seen as a linear process. Understanding that the local conditions are always being shaped and re-shaped by structures of society (see Chapter 4), a pedagogy that responds to those contextual shifts should be prepared for both successes and setbacks.

Throughout the year we spent together we experienced victories and setbacks along the way. The Fellows, Meghan, and I learned how to better deal with these setbacks throughout the year (at minimum we recognized the need to plan for set-backs). When Meghan and I asked Juve what he learned about roadblocks the year of the Fellowship he said, “Work hard for what you want because it won't come to you without a fight” (Quarter 3 reflection, May, 2015). In other situations, the Fellows did not have so much agency. After a stream of let-downs and broken promises, Faith wrote

It really is just how the Fellowship is coming to an end it just seems like a whole bunch of lost promises. Like alot of stuff was promised that they knew We were never going to get. The way that they did us with the trlor and where we should place our exhibit was just wrong. I hate how they try to threaten us and hold stuff over our heads like our fate hasn't already been decided by them. Its just really really Strange to see how all of this played out. Sort of growing up and always hearing about how Corrupt politics are and actually having to be a product of that. Not even a actual product but just a pawn. It sucks to feel used like that especially by people that we view as leaders. (daily reflection, July 29, 2015)
As the adult facilitators of the space, Meghan and I did not want the Fellowship to add to the Fellows’ fatalistic dispositions. Because the Fellowship took place in the real world, not an isolated classroom where imaginative settings can be created, we were forced to deal with the power structure of the real world, a power structure that did not concede easily. Meghan and I learned, through our year working with the Fellows, that supporting their hope and agency was no easy task. Supporting the fellows 1) reading of the world, and 2) maintenance of their sense of hope was a complex and dialectic task that involved the Fellows too. As a collective, we depended on each other, learned from each other, and critiqued and pushed each other towards new understandings of the world. Our deep relationships and trust for one another helped to maintain engagement and investment along the way.

As adults in the space we believed that continuous dialogue and collective reflection, could serve as the methodology to support the Fellows’ navigation of the complexities of the real world. We did not have all the answers, but we had the power to create the context for new understandings and problem solving. This certainly helped us maintain a sense of collective and individual hope, even as fatalism emerged.

**A Pedagogy of Risk is praxis.**

During her last month of employment with the Fellowship, Shawntay was asked to define praxis. She said, “I think praxis is theory and action. Like, knowing what you need to achieve in action and even action. As you take action you still have to think” (Shawntay, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015). Praxis, used a verb, was a grounding principle of the Fellowship. I brought in the work of Paulo Freire, whose writings were the Fellows and Meghan’s first introduction to the Fellowship, to help us explore the concept of praxis and its implications in our work.
Eventually, the Fellows embodied praxis as a principle of their work. Once they were able to build connections between reflection and action, Meghan and I stopped receiving so many comments like “why are we doing anything?”. Faith eludes to this when she wrote:

I personally have found, that there is no use in dwelling on these experiences whether they be victories of defeats but instead use them as lessons to make me who I am. From these experiences I was able to piece together things that make me. These moments formed, my values, morals, and interest. Before Greenhouse Fellowship I believed that I was supposed to pick my few beliefs and stick to them for the rest of my life. Greenhouse Fellowship has open my eyes to see that I am always evolving and the theories that I have about life and my own will change as well (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015).

When Jaylah wrote, “Greenhouse has opened my eyes to the injustice world I live in, and has given me the resources to do something about it” (Quarter 3 reflection, May, 2015) she seemed to highlight the relationship between theory and action. The Fellowship was not just a place of theorizing, nor was it a place of sole action. The Fellowship was a place of praxis—where the Fellows were opening their eyes, critically observing the world around them, while also engaging in action to “do something about” their new observations.

**Conclusion**

This chapter sought to explore the role of the educator in Greenhouse Fellowship. What emerged from my analysis is what I have termed, a pedagogy of risk. A pedagogy of risk is a six-pillar framework for teaching and learning that I hope can, when applied appropriately to other educative contexts, support popular education methodologies.
taking place in and out of schools. Additionally, a pedagogy of risk, as it emerged in Greenhouse Fellowship, served as a foundation for the teaching and learning experiences that occurred throughout our year together.

Each of the six-pillars: relationships, relevance, revolution, recognition, responsiveness, and reflection, while presented in isolation (with the exception of recognition and responsiveness) for the purpose of this chapter, should be seen as interconnected. As detailed, the pedagogy of risk exhibited by Meghan and I: centered justice, met the survival needs of the Fellows, was non-hierarchical while also being youth centered, painful, complex, and it was grounded in praxis.

I use the term “pillar” here symbolically to demonstrate their supportive attributes to the Fellowship, and possible contributions to other popular education contexts. Because of their load-bearing nature, each pillar was required to keep balance—the absence or de-emphasis of one or more pillars may have led to a collapse. As detailed throughout this chapter the pillars should not be viewed and interpreted as products, but rather processes of contextual and pedagogical considerations and query.

According to Freire (1970), “Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students” (p. 72). Relationships in the Fellowship were an attempt to break the traditional hierarchy existent in many educational settings between teachers and students, between adults and youth. Although it took us much of the year to break these hierarchical molds, we eventually, were able to recognize the
authority that each of us held. After the Fellows presented in Los Angeles, California, at their first academic conference, we were fortunate enough to have a private conversation with Freirian scholar and educator, Antonia Darder. During that conversation Dr. Darder reminded us that “we have a responsibility to respect each other’s authority, but we also have responsibility to not become authoritative” (personal communication, June 12, 2015). While this conversation took place near the end of the Fellowship, it reminded us (it certainly had a big impact on me) of the importance of authority in any educative space. Thinking back to the year that we spent together, I often struggled with what it meant to be a facilitator of learning, as opposed to a depositor of information (what Freire described as a banking methodology). I wanted the Fellows to have decision-making power, but I also understood, contained in Darder’s message to us, that Meghan and I played an important role in the distribution of power. Meghan, the Fellows, and I had to be cognizant of each other’s unique contributions to our collective. As the following data shows, there were identifiable moments where we were able to utilize each other’s unique assets to do collective work.

The educator engaged with a pedagogy of risk has two important roles. Ideologically and pragmatically, Meghan, the Fellows and I used each of the pillars to create contexts and processes for the Fellowship. As the initial decision-makers, Meghan and I had to consider what role the Fellows, and us as adults, played in the processes of the Fellowship. The six pillars served as pathways to develop and implement those roles. Additionally, Meghan and I used the pillars to critically reflect on the past and plan for

---

19 It’s important to note here breaking hierarchy in the Fellowship was also influenced by the Fellowship’s setting. We weren’t in a school, with normalized power distribution between teacher and student.
the future. More specifically, and important to highlight here, the pillars provided
Meghan and I the solitude and collaborative experiences to become more mindful of the
ways in which we may have reproduced the structures of domination.

Because Meghan and I were active participants, working alongside the Fellows, the Fellowship was also a context to cultivate our agency. Meghan was able to develop the confidence to see herself as capable and contributive and I was able to better navigate the complexities my role as the facilitator of justice-centered work.

A pedagogy of risk might be useful in (re)conceptualizing the role of the educator. Because U.S. schools have historically and overwhelmingly been sites of indoctrination, serving as an extension of the State’s efforts to maintain order and control amongst dispossessed people while also being spaces where educators and others have always resisted these oppressive forces. Liberatory educators, or those interested in moving away from the oppressive structuring of schooling, may find a pedagogy of risk useful in their classrooms—constructing ways to use in and out of school spaces as sites of re-imagination. A pedagogy of risk may create sites where students can explore their lived realities, develop analytical tools to better understand the structures of oppression and liberation existent in their lives, and engage in a re-imagining and a re-writing of the world. The 6 Pillars of the pedagogy of risk presented emerged from Greenhouse Fellowship’s reinvention of Paulo Freire’s popular education framework.

Today’s world is one filled with hate and oppression, but that hate and oppression can be circumvented with love; a love that allows us to reimagine and reconstruct our lives in the face of danger. Angela Davis (2016) argues

This is an era where we have to encourage that sense of community particularly at a time when neoliberalism attempts to force people to think of themselves only in
individual terms and not in collective terms. It is in collectivities that we find reservoirs of hope and optimism (p. 49).

I hope that readers find the hope and optimism Angela Davis mentioned embedded into a pedagogy of risk. Throughout this dissertation I argue that critical hope can, and should, be part of every school’s identity and mission, but enacting this pedagogy is a risk. As the stories presented in this chapter detailed, Meghan and I engaged in, and developed, a pedagogy of risk throughout our time in the Fellowship. We did not come into Greenhouse Fellowship knowing what we did by the time we left. In many ways, Meghan and I did what Freire was doing himself—studying and learning our own and others’ praxis, re-inventing and sharing our findings and experiences.
Chapter 6— I ain’t no activist…well maybe I am

So back to [the] who I become question and my answer to that would be ‘I have no clue’. So what path I would take I have no idea but I know whatever path [I] take it’s because I choose to and I know that there is a goal behind [it]. So my journey of knowing who I am, who I will become, and what makes me who I am today is still going. They’re no straight answer[s] to this, It SADDER THOUGHTS, CONCLUSION[S], DREAMS, HOPES, PRAXIS, and ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Shawntay, Quarter 3 reflection, May, 2015

People always telling me in the hood that they’re proud of me cause I’m like the only one who really give a fuck out our age group and I'm like... Man everybody cares. They just don't know how to. I always think about ways that people could help out without it being totally corny and just Super activist like. So many people don't want to take on more than they can chew or fear what people may say about them. How can you make it cool to help your community?

-Faith, daily reflection, July 17, 2015

Throughout the year-long Fellowship, JJ, Juve, Faith, Shawntay, and Jaylah participated in one-on-one interviews with Meghan and I three times—at the start, three months into, and at the conclusion of their formal time together. In each of those interviews we asked them “are you an activist?” Their responses to the question changed during each interview. Some claimed that they were activists while others revealed they were not, providing rich justifications to support their perceptions. Their perceptions of what defined an activist evolved conceptually, interview to interview.
I came to discover that my query was not about whether the Fellows were, or considered themselves, activists or not, but more so if, and how, their agentic identities evolved over time and what experiences cultivated, and hindered, this evolution. Chapter 4 of this dissertation argues that context influences agency—East Chicago and the world, as a system of inter-twined structures, had an impact on how the Fellows defined activism and how they saw themselves as activists. The unique real-world setting of Greenhouse Fellowship provided the context for an additional query. Because the Fellowship was situated outside of a school, outside of the boundaries of schooling—both physically and pedagogically—I was also interested in understanding how the youth I was working alongside were making sense of this work in the real world. The fellows had to navigate the complexities of the world on many different levels. They were emerging into adulthood while also becoming critically aware and attentive to issues in their community. Somewhere within the process of critically examining their worlds and figuring out who they were becoming as young adults, they were able to recognize, and act on, their ability to recreate the world.

This chapter will explore how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship negotiated their agentic identities in the real world—a real world that often encouraged them to act within the normalized systems in place. Ideologies of individualism teach youth (and adults) that when harm is done, it is the victim’s fault. To explore the Fellows’ transforming agentic identities I retell the journeys of two Fellows: Jaylah and JJ. Jaylah and JJ represent two, of five (seven if you include Meghan and I) stories of transformation within Greenhouse Fellowship. I chose these two stories because they demonstrate the range of starting points that the Fellows entered with and the transformations that occurred through their participation in the year-long experience. As
the rest of the chapter details, while JJ and Jaylah had unique and individualized agentic transformations, their narratives are also somewhat illustrative of the commonalities between all of the Fellows. By following the evolution of JJ’s and Jaylah’s agentic identities and perceptions I hope to engage readers in a better understanding of the relationship between Greenhouse Fellowship and the Fellows’ evolving agentic identities. Greenhouse Fellowship was a site where the Fellows developed a critical capacity to view the world, recognized themselves and the world as incomplete, and began to see themselves as actors in (re)writing their lives and the future of their city—who the Fellows were, and how they saw themselves, was ever changing.

Throughout the year, youth activism across the U.S. had a visible presence—videos of youth-led sit-ins, protests, and other actions, on social media news feeds provides daily examples and reminders of various forms of activism taking place. Because “activism” and “activists” were so visible in the national landscape, I found it interesting to explore how the Fellows both defined activism and saw themselves as activists. I did this to better understand how their agentic identities were shaped by outside influences (the media, their community, their social networks, etc.) and the inside influences of the Fellowship. I assumed, that because “activism” (as term) was so visible in the Fellows’ lives, it could provide a relevant starting point for them to name and describe their agentic identities. Secondly, I hoped to use the Fellows’ responses to their definitions and relationships to “activism” as possible explorations of their evolving hope. As stated in the Theoretical Framework of this dissertation, I take the position that

---

20 I hope to explore the transforming agentic identities of the remaining three Fellows’ in future studies. I, however, interweave their narratives through this chapter to support my claims.
“healing and hope [are] prerequisites for activism and social change” (Ginwright, 2010, p. 7) with the caveat that the process is more dialectical than Ginwright’s words. However the Fellows used the Fellowship to expand their relationship to activism.

Chapter 5 of this dissertation explored the role of the adults in Greenhouse Fellowship through what I have termed a pedagogy of risk. This chapter seeks to build on the contents of that chapter—shedding light on the generative themes that emerged from the pedagogies enacted by Meghan and I, and more importantly, the Fellows’ evolving hope (figure 13).

Figure 13. A pedagogy of risk revisited
While the Pedagogy of Risk provides a foundational framework for teaching and learning, as it occurred within the Fellowship, the narratives presented as follows help connect the relationship between what Meghan and I did, as the adults in Greenhouse Fellowship, and the Fellows’ relationships to activism and hope.

**Jaylah – I’m an activist…Wait, no I’m not…Wait, yes I am, just not yet**

My name is Jaylah Nicole Davis. I’m 18 years old and graduated from Central High School in East Chicago, Indiana. I like to debate, sing, and make others happy. Making others happy and helping others makes me happy. I hate for people around me to be upset or in need of something. I love East Chicago but it’s very much in need of improvement and that’s why I chose to be a part of the greenhouse fellowship. I know EC has a lot of potential but it’s hard for others to see it because of all the negative things people hear and say about EC. It’s even hard for people that live in EC to believe EC will ever get better because of how people constantly talk about our city. What I expect from the GHF is for it to give us (the fellows) the skills, the knowledge, and the extra push we may need to change our city. I expect for Asif and Meghan to help us reach our goals but not to take over whatever it is we’re doing. I don’t want them to baby us or to sugar coat anything. If they feel something isn’t working or if I’m doing something wrong, they should correct it. I’m a hard worker and love my city, so I’ll be dedicated to making my city a better place. Once this year is over, I want to be able to say; through the greenhouse fellowship I was able to make my city a better place.

- Jaylah, autobiography, September, 2014
When Jaylah accepted the position at Greenhouse Fellowship the summer after she graduated from high school, she, and eight other recent graduates from Central High School in East Chicago, embarked on a year-long journey that impacted each of them in different ways. They did not quite know what they were getting into—aside from a full-time job with a salary, working in a community organization, and helping their city—but they were willing to take the risk and defer their post-secondary plan(s) (if they had them) for a year.

Jaylah was from Sunnyside, a working-class neighborhood in the Indiana Harbor, known for its brick duplexes and single-family homes. At the time of this study it was one of the more economically stable areas in East Chicago. Inland Steel built the first 200 homes for their upper-level employees in Sunnyside in 1918 and another 100 new units following the second world war (Porta, 1994). Inland maintained ownership of the properties in Sunnyside until 1969, when the company started selling the units to the employees, and later the general public (Porta, 1994).

Jaylah lived with her mom, but her Granddad—her “homie” (Jaylah, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015) was a few blocks away and often gave her rides to and from work. Jaylah valued family, friends, and in high school, was part of a youth-led organization called the Circle. In the Circle Jaylah participated in her first experiences with “activism” (Jaylah, baseline interview, August, 2014). Service was important to Jaylah, with a particular emphasis on “helping people.”

Jaylah’s participation in the Circle, and a lack of a clear post-secondary vision for herself, prompted her to apply to be a Fellow. East Chicago was a very religious town, and Jaylah’s family was no different. Like most East Chicagoan’s, Jaylah loved East Chicago—the city that raised her mother and where her Grandfather spent most of his
adult life, the city where she would spend her entire (up to that point) educative career, and the city that she was interested in “helping”.

Jaylah used the experiences she had in Fellowship to deconstruct and reconstruct her dispositions related to activism, moving beyond activism as helping people into an identity that included an orientation towards social justice. What follows is a presentation of the Jaylah’s documented reflections and experiences related to her self-perceptions of activism (agency) along with my analysis of their implications.

**Jaylah’s initial self-perceptions of agency.**

Asif: Are you an activist?

Jaylah: Umm, yeah. Because I’m a part of the Circle. . . and we, uh, I like to think we’re activists. We go out . . . we recently had a . . . celebration for us being a group for two years and our group, we gave out scholarships to the high school and we helped with community service. We cleaned up the streets in the Harbor and in E. C. We had a rally for the violence in E. C. I like to think we’re activists. . . . A time I stood up for something. Uh, O.K. We were at this party I guess. And this girl, her friend was like taking pills and she took like four pills and she was like trying to get her friend to take pills and her friend was scared. And I was like, if you don’t want to take the pills, you don’t have to. She ended up taking the pills any way but I’d like to think that I maybe made her think more before she decided to take the pills because she decided to take just two pills instead of all four of them. . . . I have drive to make East Chicago better. I’m willing to do things that most people wouldn’t feel like doing or don’t want to put up with or deal with. I’m willing to pick up trash in East Chicago. I don’t think anybody wakes up [and says] I’m going to go outside and pick up the trash outside but I was willing
to do that because I love East Chicago and I want East Chicago to get better and
to get better it has to look better so people can come out here and help, I guess
(Jaylah, baseline interview, August, 2014)

Without many models of activism to point to, Jaylah’s activist identity was
shaped through several spaces: the Circle, school, her household, and church. While each
certainly had its nuances, the commonality between the four may lead to a framing of
activism as “service work,” what the Fellows often called “helping people”.

Throughout our year together, the Fellows named their desires to help people but
their perceptions of what “helping people” meant (in both conceptualization and action)
evolved over time. The experiences of Jaylah and the other Fellows were part of their
identities well before the Fellowship. I argue that these early forms of agency (helping
people, community service, standing up for others), were the starting points that the
Fellows and the Fellowship, had to begin with. Regardless of how we, as researchers and
educators, come to see and critique these early agentic identities, it is important to
acknowledge that these served as catalysts for future agentic development in each of the
Fellows. Like stated in Chapter 5, Meghan and I built in processes to better understand
the Fellows starting points, and relationships, to activism. Additionally, we constructed
relevant teaching and learning experiences that utilized these starting points as catalysts
to future investigation and agency development

During her first interview Jaylah told Meghan and me, “I like for people to feel
good. Like, if I feel good, I want other people to feel good too. If I’m not struggling, then
I don’t want anybody else to struggle. I want us to all be O.K.” (Jaylah, baseline
interview, August, 2014). Jaylah’s initial activist identity was shaped by a sense of
service—and more specifically, service within the confines of acceptable activism (see
Chapter 2). She viewed neighborhood cleanups, non-violent rallies and fund raising as acceptable forms of activism. Freire reminds us that help can only truly be helpful when “all who are involved help each other mutually (1998, p. 8). Authentic help “means that all who are involved help each other mutually, growing together in the common effort to understand the reality which they seek to transform” (p. 8). Jaylah, and the Fellows, wanted to help East Chicago because it was their city, it was the place where they grew up, the place that they called home. While they were helping East Chicago they were also helping themselves—they were part of East Chicago.

Three months after the start of the Fellowship, Meghan and I forced Jaylah to re-visit the conversation on activism:

Meghan: Do you consider yourself an activist?

Jaylah: Um, right now, no because we haven’t really done any activist things but we’re working on it. We had a meeting and we’re doing this open house to get kids off the street on Fridays. I’m sure we’ll do other things but right now I don’t think I’m an activist at this moment. I haven’t been to any meetings, like the library meeting.\textsuperscript{21} I didn’t go to that meeting (Jaylah, Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014).

Here, much like her initial perceptions of what activism was and what activists do, Jaylah’s association with activism comes by way of “doing stuff”. In reflecting on the

\textsuperscript{21} Our attendance at this Library Board of Directors meeting was prompted by a Facebook post by a community member alerting the public that the library had a ban on unaccompanied children under the age of nine. During meeting, the library director followed her support of the restriction of unaccompanied youth with an announcement of shortened library hours because of “safety concerns” for her staff. This meeting prompted the Fellows to engage in an eight-month long organizing campaign to increase the programing in the library.
first three months of the fellowship pedagogically, Jaylah was right, we weren’t “doing stuff” the ways in which they had envisioned. I, as the teacher and pedagogical authority in the space to decide on curricular experience, believed that we should engage in experiences that would heighten the Fellows’ critical analysis—reading the world through systems and structures—if we were going engage in service work that could lead structural change. I believed that if we could not critically understand what was shaping our world, we could not dismantle oppression in East Chicago (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion on the role of the educators).

Most of the Fellows thought that the Fellowship was a space where they were going to “go out” and “help the community.” They believed that “helping the community” came through physical acts of labor (neighborhood clean-ups, food drives, etc), not necessarily reading books and talking about history. In fact, roughly three months into the Fellowship, we would have to call the Fellows to a meeting to address their growing concerns with us not “doing stuff for, and thus not helping East Chicago.”

The first three months of the Fellowship were dedicated to a great deal of study—study of self and community. A review of the seminar topics during from the first three months of the Fellowship revealed that while the Fellows were engaged in some action (our organization’s soft launch event, the community tour, and the early stages of the library project), much of our time together was spent heightening our curiosities through investigation. Jaylah spent time developing questions about East Chicago and her life, exploring those questions through research and information gathering, and making sense of her findings. More specifically, Jaylah was conducting statistical research on East Chicago, discovering new understanding of the city through interviews and library research, reading about the Black Panther Party Survival Programs and Kohn’s (1986)
argument again competition and individuality, critically analyzing East Chicago redevelopment plans, engaging in learning experiences with seminar guests related to developing a systems analysis, and she was given space in the Fellowship to present her new discoveries to the other Fellows, Meghan, and I.

My attempt here to highlight the great deal of intellectual work the Fellows completed during the first three months of the Fellowship should not be misinterpreted through a false dichotomization of theory from action. Our theory (inquiry related to East Chicago and the relevant findings) certainly informed our action (events and meetings, the community tour) and vis versa. Additionally, theory and action should not be viewed as two separate behaviors—the two are inseparable. As we thought we were doing and as were doing we were thinking. However, our journey emphasized research and analysis in our first three months and helped the Fellows expand their notions of activism, their relationship to activism, and better understand the relationship between systems of oppression and issues in their community. These initial explorations and (re)conceptualizations laid the basis for their subsequent development.

Like the behaviors of youth explored in Solórzano’s and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) study, Jaylah’s initial agency was “motivated by social justice yet hold no critique of the systems of oppression” (p. 318). Her initial agentic identity was driven by hopes to engage in justice work (helping people in East Chicago) while participating in “more liberal tradition” (p. 318) activities, “offering Band-Aids to take care of symptoms of the problem rather than deal with the structural causes of the problem” (p. 318).

---

22 See Chapter 2 for a discussion on all four categories of Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal’s (2001) Transformational Resistance Framework. The behaviors exhibited here fit with the conformist resistance category.
Jaylah’s initial conceptualizations of activism did not contain a critique of social, economic, and political structures that created and maintained oppression in her community. The Fellowship created an educative context for Jaylah, and the other Fellows, to critically examine their worlds—cultivating their systemic analysis and drive to action along the way. Jaylah’s initial agency transformed through her experiences at the Fellowship.

**Transformational agency: By any means necessary.**

Roughly eight months into the Fellowship, Jaylah began to be explicit about her new-found social justice identity in her writing, her research, and her actions. As far back as December (four months into the Fellowship), Jaylah was doing extensive research on social movement organizations like Anonymous, Black Youth Project 100, and the Black Panther Party. She was interested in learning more about how organizations and communities were unearthing critical knowledge and engaging in the building of a new world that was more just. In researching the Black Panther Party Jaylah said

the Black Panthers…saw something wrong and did whatever they needed to do to change that wrong. Whether it ended them up in prison or they ended up dying from it, they were focused on fixing that one wrong. And no matter what happened they were going to keep trying to fix that one wrong until it got right (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

In her third quarter written reflection Jaylah wrote

Before Greenhouse Fellowship, I didn't know too much about social justice. When I would hear about police harming people of color, would think it was something they did and that the police were just doing their job. Greenhouse has opened my eyes to the injustice [in the] world I live in, and has given me the
resources to do something about it. . . . My community is changing, seemingly for the better, but it could still use some improvement. My main concern is all the police officers in East Chicago that aren't from East Chicago. If they're not from here, they don't know the people from here and will more than likely, treat us however they want. I'm sure they’ve heard a lot of bad things about East Chicago, so when something happens they're going to immediately come prepared to defend themselves. Don’t think can do anything about the new police officers, but what can be done is us, East Chicagoans, working together to keep each other informed on new laws being made and the rights we all possess. We need to work together to raise the children so they know their rights, and how to respond to officers if they're pulled over. We can have meetings with Mayor Copeland and the chief of police about the police in East Chicago, but if we do not first educate ourselves all these meetings will have been for nothing (Jaylah, Quarter 3 reflection, May, 2015).

When Jaylah mentions “Greenhouse has opened my eyes to the injustice [in the] world I live in” she is demonstrating her “developing” agentic identity.

She was developing the critical capacity to connect her observations to systems and structures, as opposed to how she was before, “thinking it was something they did”, blaming the individual and not the system of oppression. While her analysis here fits within acceptable forms of activism (awareness, community, and meetings), she felt as if she “has the tools to do something about” the issues in her community. We can also see Jaylah’s embodiment of praxis here, where she found relevance in education before actions; this seems to nuance her initial definition of activism and critique of the Fellowship, where activism was solely about “doing things.” Her call to “first educate
herself” demonstrates Jaylah’s new conceptualization of praxis—the importance of both reflection and action. Like Freire, Jaylah reminds us of the importance of a united collective consciousness as part of the liberation process.

At this point in the year, Jaylah shifted away from conformist behaviors (Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001) and moved towards an articulation of a transformational identity. Her behaviors illustrated “both a critique of oppression and a desire for social justice” (Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 319), what Solórzano and Delgado-Bernal (2001) referred to as transformational resistance. During Jaylah’s last interview of the Fellowship (last month of the Fellowship) she and I had an exchange about her understanding of mass incarceration:

Asif: So talk more about that—breaking down the prison industrial complex, or whatever you want to call it.

Jaylah: What I figured out was that when daddy goes to jail for selling drugs, mom gets forced on welfare and welfare doesn't really do too much. It gives you a little money here and there, but you got to figure it out from after that. So the baby, when the baby gets older, it’s like “I’m not finna be struggling” so that baby got to do illegal stuff because there’s no jobs. And like the illegal thing leads to prison. And there’s this circle. . . . I don’t want to sound corny. . . but like figuring out how to end that cycle is another reason why I decided to be in criminal justice (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

Jaylah articulated the school to prison nexus in a way that was accessible to others, shared that information in conversation with her friends and family, and constructed a pathway for herself to participate in its dismantling. Jaylah’s transformation indicates an agentic identity that is “political, collective, conscious, and motivated by a
sense that individual and social change is possible” (Solarzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 321). Jaylah demonstrated a long-term commitment to the social justice project and chose to work within the current structures to create change. Her use of the verb “end,” however, implied that she was committed to working within the system to eliminate the system.

During the same interview, Meghan and I asked Jaylah if she was an activist:

Asif: Are you an activist?

Jaylah: Yeah, I think so. Maybe to a certain extent. Cause I don’t plan on dying for any causes right now, maybe on in the future something crazy will happen, I’ll be like “yup, I’ll die for it.” But I don’t know right now.

Asif: What would you fight for? Maybe not die for?

Jaylah: Definitely for, I don’t know, like if a law came about something terrible, like something about low income families or something like that. Like “exterminate all of them.” I don’t know—I would definitely fight for something like that because that’s where I come from, that’s where I was born, in a low income urban area, and I see the potential that these small communities have, and I would definitely fight for them. Especially East Chicago. . . . When you’re like an activist, I guess, you can’t do normal 18 year old things. It’s like, cause you have work to do. You have something that needs to be done. Like, Faith and Juve had a proposal that needed to be wrote, and me and Shawntay been working on this survey. And there’s always something to be done and like after high school you were like trying to get your last summer in and trying to enjoy it with your friends. . . And we. . . maybe couldn’t go to all the parties and do all the stuff that they were doing because, like, maybe Saturday we had to go somewhere or
something like that. But I think that this experience was way better than spending the summer with my friends not doing nothing. I think that this was a much better experience. (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

Jaylah, by the conclusion of the Fellowship and maybe sooner, didn’t see herself as a “normal” 18-year-old. She found the experiences in the Fellowship “way better” than “spending the summer with friends.” Jaylah was committed to a larger social justice project which included helping people and making her community a better place.

Jaylah’s last statement reminds me of a statement in Pedagogy of the Oppressed: The radical, committed to human liberation, does not become the prisoner of a “circle of certainty” within which reality is also imprisoned. On the contrary, the more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can better transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (Freire, 1970, p. 39)

Summary: Jaylah’s shifting perceptions and relationship to agency

Jaylah may not have had every step of her life planned after high school, and certainly did not view the world like she would come to have after spending a year engaged in praxis alongside the Fellows, her family, East Chicago, Meghan, and I through Greenhouse Fellowship. Over the course of the year, Jaylah explored what it meant to be an activist, and more importantly, her role in creating a more just world (see figure 14). Her initial conceptions of activism exemplified safe forms—acts of with no
structural or systemic critique or hopes of dismantling—that may have had very little impact on dismantling oppression. This identity, however, evolved into a praxis rooted in a critical reading of the world and a social justice framework for action. Jaylah’s hopes to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline (which she learned about through reading the *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander, 2012) through a career in criminal justice provided an example of her long-term commitment to dismantling oppression in her world.

![Figure 14. Jaylah’s agency development](image)

Learning about “social justice,” as Jaylah mentioned, provided her and the other Fellows with the experiences, theories, and examples of movements and people that were, currently and historically, reading and writing their lives, dismantling oppression, and building a more just world. These social justice “role models” seemed to be necessary in providing the Fellows with examples of possibilities. In communities like
East Chicago, that have (or are) experienced an erasure of activism (see Chapter 4), these role models can help cultivate an imaginative landscape by which to (re)conceptualize social, economic, and political alternatives to their lives.

Jaylah is one of five examples of how the Fellows agentic identities evolved over time in the Fellowship and how they negotiated them in the real world. While this is one example, based on Jaylah’s unique understanding of the world, it can lend itself to a better understanding of how youth may negotiate activism when given the opportunities to use school, and education, as the opportunity to explore the world around them and facilitate an active process, with few limitations, to do something about the pain and oppression emergent in their examination(s).

**JJ: Social Justice Praxis from the Jump**

My name is JJ Roshonda Freeman. I had a one-year-old son by the name of Damon. To have fun I like to play, read and teach my son new things. My favorite subjects in School City of East Chicago central high school was math, science and Com Art/ working on computers. As I get old and began to go to college I would [know] I am going to become a nurse. I always wanted to help people and I feel like this is my way of doing so. The number one thing that interest me the most is have someone to talk to about anything I believe that it is because when I was younger I had no one to talk to because I was in a group home. I was taken from my mother at the age of 16 years old because she was beating me and I could never talk to her about anything. And it wasn’t like I was a bad kid I was the kid in class on time everyday. I would be the one to finish my work before anyone else in class. I was the kind of kid that got A’s and B’s but she was never happy so what would really make me happy is know that I have a group of peers.
that I can talk to about my concerns or any problems or struggles I may be juggling with. My strengths are that I am a determine, intelligent, perfections that always get thing done rite. Not saying that I never mess up I do, everyone does at time but once I mess up I work to improve my mistake. I’m not looking for Meghan and Asif to do anything but to be helpful wen I need someone to talk to. . All that I am looking for from the GHF is a helping hand to do something better with the City of East Chicago. To help Us residents of East Chicago make a differences and to show people that East Chicago isn’t the worst place to be.

-JJ, autobiography, September, 2014

JJ decided to defer her enrollment at Purdue University to join Greenhouse Fellowship. After hearing about the year-long opportunity in one of her high school classes, she and her best friend, Shawntay, applied and were accepted into the program. JJ’s quest for independence—from the State, as a mother, and for herself—served as early driving factors of JJ’s agency and catalysts to further development throughout the year as a Fellow.

After spending her childhood in Chicago, JJ, her mom, two older brothers, and two little sisters moved to East Chicago. JJ was 13 years old and in the 8th grade. Darkside, where JJ and her family settled, stands in the shadows of the elevated Chicago Avenue bridge. The rail shipping line, running underneath, and perpendicular to the overpass, remains a sign of the city’s close relationship to industry. JJ’s house was popular, as it also served as the neighborhood candy store. JJs mom, like other unemployed East Chicagoans, had to be creative finding the means for economic survival.
JJ’s childhood was tough—she experienced physical and mental abuse, going back and forth between foster care and her mother’s house. At the age of 17, JJ gave birth to Damon, her number one priority. During her first interview with Meghan and me, JJ told us that Damon “inspires me every morning” (baseline interview, August, 2014).

Eight months before the start of the Fellowship, near the end of her senior year of high school, JJ and Damon became part of the foster care system, living in between a single-family foster home and a large foster care facility, The St. Mary Home. Through all of this, JJ was still able to call East Chicago home. She told Meghan and me

I feel like East Chicago is a great place. And I would say that because from day one that I moved out here, I could see diversity. You could go outside and make friends with anybody. Your next door neighbors could not know you and you could be sitting in front of the house by yourself and they don’t know you, they just sitting there and they’d see you lonely and I noticed that the neighbors are actually pretty. . . They’re, like, awesome how they’re really, really nice. They’ll just come down, “Hey, you want to play with me,” or something like that. And I noticed that with my little sister. . . In Chicago it wasn’t like that. They’re not fixin’ to come up to you and play with you. No. . . I feel like the whole community should be able to communicate with each other no matter how it is (baseline interview, August, 2014).

Being a mother was her primary focus; all other hopes, goals, and even personal needs came second for JJ. JJ had dreams of becoming a nurse, working in East Chicago with other teen mothers and soon-to-be mothers. She was a resilient, motivated, and mature young woman with a lot to contribute to the world.
As the narratives that follow describe, Greenhouse Fellowship became a space for JJ to: reclaim kinship, continue to heal from her trauma, build career networks, and engage in a social justice praxis that contributed to structural change in East Chicago. JJ’s drive to help people and her maturity served as initial indicators of her agency. Her experiences in Greenhouse Fellowship gave her the context to expand and transform these initial perceptions of activism through a critical reading and re-writing of the world.

**JJ’s Early Perceptions of activism: Early signs of praxis.**

Meghan: What does being an activist mean to you? Do you know, like do you have an idea of what activism is to you?

JJ: Like to act on something? Like, the first thing that pops in my head.

Meghan: For a cause?

JJ: Yeah. I think that’s one of the strongest points that I actually have.

Asif: Why so?

JJ: Because since I was young I always told myself like I’ll set goals for myself and nobody actually knows about it. Like, I’ve had this little book since I was like five years old I used to just doodle in it but I actually kept it and kept adding pages to it. . . . it’s about this thick now. . . . And at least like once a month, I’ll set a goal and I have to complete it by the end of that month. If I don’t complete it by the end of the month, I’ll set another goal to complete that goal and to show how I could work better to complete those goals. Like, so . . . my last goal was to finish the EMT. Like at one point I was signing up for classes and seeing what I want to do. I know I want to be a nurse. I know I want to go on to medical but I . . . how to start or what to do; then eventually they were telling us to go to the EMT program. And they didn’t do it like Greenhouse. They didn’t offer it to everybody
. . . . So I wrote down in the book I was like “set goal.” Sign up EMT graduate by end of high school and I ended up finishing it. I graduated. We graduated two weeks, right before graduation, did the summer working with the EMT’s. It was nice. (baseline interview, August, 2014)

While JJ’s initial perceptions of activism here involved “acting on something,” her explanation of her relationship to activism is symbolic of a methodology rooted in praxis. After stating that acting on something—activism—is “one of the strongest points I actually have,” JJ rationalized the importance of engaging in praxis—both reflection and action. Her “little book”, which was actually several five-subject notebooks full of notes, served as a reflective space for JJ to conceptualize and rationale her actions.

Additionally, she highlighted the cyclical nature of her praxis saying “If I don’t complete it by the end of the month, I’ll set another goal to complete that goal and to show how I could work better to complete those goals.” As she acted in the world, she was explicit in reflecting on those actions in relationship to her goals. JJ may not have been able to initially associate the process with “praxis,” but her initial perceptions of activism as both reflection and action demonstrate her embodiment of the term. Here, JJ’s initial perceptions of activism included reflection, a distinguishing factor when compared to Jaylah’s initial perceptions where activism was “doing stuff.”

Three months into the Fellowship, JJ struggled to situate herself as an “activist.” In some ways she was and in others she was not. When asked “are you an activist” JJ responded

JJ: I don’t know [whispering]. . . In certain ways I think I am because I think about things, based off of those thinkings I try to act on them. . . I just one day felt like Ferguson needed help and I went on to St. Mary Home. . . and asked her
[Sister Jessepie] could we donate some stuff to . . . I seen that Kristiana [a Greenhouse Fellowship guest speaker] had posted . . . that they were doing shipments to Ferguson so I asked her how could . . . we donate the stuff . . . to Ferguson. . . I went on the Lost Voices page and donated 150.00 dollars once I got paid and I felt like, I don’t know, it’s kind of hard because I don’t know how to define activist.

Asif: When do you think you are not an activist?

JJ: Because I think about myself before I act…like when you hear about activists and things like that they’re down for what they believe in and they are moving forward. And they don’t care what it is they are going for it. Like the repercussions, like Deja from Lost Voices, they getting locked up every few minutes. . . Like the whole march to Chicago, when I was talking about going I actually sat down and thought about it like, “no,” cause I don’t want to take the chance and get locked up. So, I don’t know, it seems like activists, they don't think, they just do. . . Maybe I need to see what I believe an activist is before I say that I am (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014).

JJ’s early perceptions of activism provided a more nuanced look into the internal negotiations she was having in relationship to her evolving agency. When she learned that a recent visitor to the Fellowship office, Kristiana, was asking for supply donations for the Lost Voices JJ used her networks (St. Mary Home, social media, and Kristina) to collect donations, and get them delivered to Ferguson. In addition, she felt compelled to donate her own money to the organization. JJ used her resources (both material and communicative) to support other activists. The Lost Voices, the group JJ donated to, visited our office several days before JJ’s donation campaign. We were able to make
better sense of what happened in Ferguson, through the Lost Voices’ counter-stories—
Ferguson had a long history of police violence, a large Klan population, and
environmental destruction done by industry, among others. The Fellows came to see that
the experiences of Black people in Ferguson were not much different than the
experiences of Black people in East Chicago—where a video tape of young high school
teenager being beaten by East Chicago Police had recently (at the time of the Lost Voices
visit) surfaced on Facebook.

To some degree, JJ’s actions here should be seen as social justice praxis. JJ’s
initial perceptions of activism were transforming. After hearing the counter-stories of the
Lost Voices, she re-examined the ways in which policing served as a racist system of
oppression in communities, like hers, across the world:

Today we met with lost voices this was a great day. Every since I have been look
more into police all over the world in different countries and states to see how
they act. . . I've looked up a lot of video tonight and all of them were bad. A
police officer pulled a man out of his car and also pulled his gun out on the
passengers inside the car. And came out and said "I'll pop a bullet So far up your
ass real quick." I really am a little lost with words now. I always believe that the
police was always out to help. Not to cause harm to a man or women because of
there skin color. It’s so hard to say but there is so much racism still going on . . . I
thought I was living in a world where the racism was gone and out dated.
Apparently it not going anywhere no matter how much time goes by . . . I feel like
we/I will never Stop fighting for my right to feel RIGHT. (daily reflection,
October 27, 2014).
JJ’s experience supporting activism in Ferguson, following the death of Michael Brown, demonstrated her evolving social justice praxis. Her experiences meeting the Lost Voices in the Fellowship office (see Chapter 5), alongside her self-driven research, helped her to reconceptualize the role policing and racism played in her life and the world. Here, JJ connected the stories of other youth to her own experiences and made further sense of them through her evolving systemic analysis. She used her new analyses, her transformed reading of the world, and the resources at her disposal to take action on the world. This was her attempt to dismantle oppression in communities like hers. It also serves as an artifact of JJ’s agency, and the role the Fellowship played in supporting her agency development.

JJ believed that activists “don’t care what it is they are going for it. Like the repercussions” and that was not something she could support. Her relationship to her son, and her commitment to always be there for him continually influenced JJ’s agentic identity. To her own admission, she had to engage in more study and more reflection to “see what I believe an activist is” before identifying herself as one, or not. This required JJ to reflect on her own well-being too—she often gave to others at the sacrifice of her own (her energy, her money, her time, her wisdom, her empathy). We, as a Fellowship, considered the relationship between trauma, healing, and our work together. The Fellowship, in addition to being a space of social justice praxis, transformed into a place of healing.

JJ’s shifting analysis: “You never are done with your research”.

In September, several weeks into the Fellowship, JJ began conducted research on the Patrick Marina—a boating dock in East Chicago. As you go deeper into the Harbor of East Chicago, you eventually run up to the shores of Lake Michigan, where you can see
the Chicago skyline in the distance. BP occupies part of the western harbor. Moving east
you hit Arcelor Mittal, the city’s largest steel mill. Directly east of the steel mill is Patrick
Marina, a small boat dock with 300 slips, butting up against the Ameristar Casino.

After reading a news article revealing that East Chicago was expanding the
marina to create more slips, JJ wanted to find out more. Before embarking on the
research endeavor we talked about it at the office. “Were East Chicago residents using
the boat docks?” It was highly unlikely that, given the lack of jobs and high poverty in
East Chicago, East Chicago residents could afford the boat sticker price, gas,
maintenance, and storage fees. JJ was determined to find out what was going on.

Monday evening, she wrote

What research can I find about the Patrick Marina? How much does the boat slip
Cost at the Marina? Does the marina give money back to the community? . . . I
learned that the marina is own by the City of East Chicago. I also learned that the
marina has a high rate for boat slips for a 12ft' is 500 hundred dollars and for a
50ft is 3,465. . . it shows that my tax dollars are going to waste because I'm
paying for a place to stay open that my city doesn't utilize. (JJ, daily reflection,
September 5, 2014).

Tuesday evening she wrote

why is the mayor expanding the boat Slips? Is it really important to reconstruct
the lakefront? . . they would not tell me where the money is going. So I need to
keep try to look deeper . . this makes me what to dig deeper to find out where is
are money going. And why are they constructing a place the city doesn't need. (JJ,
daily reflection, September 6, 2014).

Friday, after a week of research, JJ wrote
How would it be to go out to the Community to ask everyone about how they feel about the marina? Do people know where their tax dollars are going? Does the community was the marina? If so what does they use the marina for?... I learn that no matter how much search and look you are never done with your research. (JJ, daily reflection, September 9, 2014).

JJ spent weeks researching the marina—discovering a great deal of new information. The Fellowship provided JJ with the space to explore her world and expand her analysis. JJ used our in-office discussions and her own reflective space to ask more questions, better understand the issues, and figure out how to share the information. Part of our learning related to the Patrick Marina included a thorough review of several revitalization plans. The plans revealed that the city was very interested in turning the Harbor into a middle-class neighborhood, and the marina was part of the plan. The city’s website had a page dedicated to the North Harbor Redevelopment Initiative (NHRI) with a statement that read “Perhaps most exciting is the City partnership with the Regional Development Authority (RDA) to revitalize the Indiana Harbor as a bona-fide lakefront community” (East Chicago, 2012). The Fellows made connections between the “revitalization” of East Chicago as a “lakefront community” and gentrification. After reading passages from *Urban Renewal or Urban Removal* (2012), the Fellows built the vocabulary (learning terms like gentrification) and the historical examples to understand patterns of gentrification in the U.S. and how they related to East Chicago. Expanding the marina was connected to a new population moving into East Chicago. A new population meant that some people would be removed.

Allowing JJ the freedom to explore the world led her to ask questions it. In the case of JJ’s study of the Patrick Marina, the critical questions she used to navigate her
query contributed to her critical analysis of revitalization efforts in East Chicago. While Meghan and I certainly had an impact on this (see Chapter 5), JJ’s curiosity, the findings, and readings all helped her move from an individual approach—how each of us felt about an object of knowing—to a political approach—one that recognized the importance of the lived experience but pushed us to relate those experiences to ideologies, structures, and systems. The Fellowship created space for JJ to ask questions about the world, a world she “thought was set up to be the ways it is” (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015). She learned “how to work within the system to get things done” (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015).

**Transforming the system from within: Developing agency through work.**

The first few months of being in the Fellowship, particularly through her experiences with a local non-profit organization for mothers, helped JJ “learn how to work within the system to get thing[s] done” (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015) while, at the same time, build her confidence to claim her authority in the world. JJ was transforming the system through several experiences: (a) JJ supported young mothers as a case worker at Mom’s Taking Charge three days a week, (b) she shifted the ideological directions of the local hospital’s services for teen parents, and (c) recognized her own agency through these experiences. I highlight each of these transformation points that follow.

Mom’s Taking Charge is an East Chicago non-profit organization designed to “assist single moms with young children and women who are pregnant, locate and access the support they need to build independent and healthy families” (Rico, 2011). They referred single mothers with children 18 and under to housing, employment, education, health care, etc. All the Fellows spent three days a week at local, community-based
organizations. Over the year she spent at Mom’s Taking Charge, JJ had a great impact on the organization.

JJ’s work included participating on a collective-impact, collaborative initiative, Bridges of Care. The task of the organization’s health committee, which Mom’s Taking Charge was a part of, was to develop interventions that could impact East Chicago’s high infant mortality rate. JJ sat quietly during the first meeting, but during the second she felt the need to speak. After seeing data showing that teen mothers had the highest rate of infant mortality in East Chicago JJ pointed out that they were talking about teen mothers with no teen mothers present. This comment shifted the inquiry of the group away from hierarchical intervention development (where those “in charge” get to decide what is best for the people) to inquiry into better understanding the needs and experiences of teen parents and pregnant teens. The group was quick to respond to JJ’s call. Hospital administration wanted to hear more about what JJ had to say.

This sense of authority, to shift the direction of healthcare services for her city, contributed to JJ’s confidence and agency development. She built the confidence to re-write the world—speaking out, in this case, demonstrates this transformational agency. St. Catherine’s hospital continued to work with JJ, and eventually the Fellows, to develop interventions related to prenatal health care. Several members of the Board of Trustees, the Chief Operations Officer, and another hospital financial executive came to the Fellowship office on November 24, 2014 to get advice from the Fellows on how to increase use of their new pre-natal center. The Fellows suggested four ideas:

- The hospital must build relationships with the community that counter the nickname they have in the community—“Killer Catherine’s.”
The hospital should hold a school assembly to inform high school students about the importance of prenatal care and how to go about receiving it. It is important here that other young people present the information not adults. The Fellows suggested ending the assembly with the launch of a design contest.

The hospital should create a promotional video to showcase the work they do, particularly related to prenatal care they provide.

The hospital needs to advertise at public places that pregnant mothers and other young people who may become pregnant frequent: like fast food restaurants, bathrooms, and the WIC office (Seminar notes, November 24, 2014).

Later that evening JJ wrote about the meeting in her daily reflection, saying Today the meeting…was great it was a chance that finally the people that know so much realize one thing that they don't know everything. . . . They came to the realization that sometime you have to go out to those people you are trying to reach to get the best answers. (JJ, daily reflection, November 24, 2014).

JJ’s comments promote listening to those impacted by situations (counter-stories) in her work (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). JJ’s growing confidence and her ability to critically examine the world led to transformational change in her community. St. Catherine’s Hospital implemented the Fellows’ ideas into their operations and, throughout the remainder of the year, JJ spent time at the pre-natal center talking with teens. JJ was happy to see that they stuck true to their word and were going to implement some of the ideas discussed:

I had a meeting with Craig Bolda [the hospital’s Chief Operations Officer] and the collative impact again the just talked about the ideas the Fellows at
greenhouse had and more ideas. And how they can start getting those ideas going. (JJ, daily reflection, December 10, 2014).

I had a small and short meeting with the hospital again. It good that they seem so honest and true to their word about trying to fix the infant mortuary rate and the bad name the hospital has. (JJ, daily reflection, December 29, 2014).

While JJ’s experiences working on reducing infant mortality in East Chicago were influenced by her commitment to act on behalf of the community and her growing critical analysis, she believed that she could work within the system to create change, and she was doing just that. Her actions were driven by both a commitment to social justice and a critique of hierarchy (Solarzano and Delgado-Bernal, 2001). The work she did through the Fellowship shifted her self-perceptions of activism. When Meghan and I asked JJ if she was an activist at the end of the Fellowship she replied

    I believe that I am a activist. Yes. I act toward a cause that I think is important.

    Are you going to ask me what is that? I feel like that question is next. . . . I can come back to East Chicago and try to work with the St. Mary Home and be an onsite nurse so they don’t always have to run to a doctor if an emergency happens. . . . I’m an activist cause I like to talk to young teen moms about situations you might deal with once you become pregnant and what you could possibly do if a situation came and you became pregnant and your mom put you out your home. Like that’s something that I had to deal with cause I didn’t know where to go. . . . I feel like I can go out and talk to some girls and instead of them having to wonder around and something probably happen to [them]. (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)
Agency and healing: What’s love got to do with it?

JJ’s experiences in the Fellowship contributed to her finding and utilizing her agency, but she could not do this on her own. JJ needed a support structure, beyond what out-of-work support systems (family, friend, and the State) offered her. She said, “By working with fellowship I finally found... myself... I have a whole support system that I can go to at any time (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015). The Fellows, Meghan, and I became part of this support system. We all provided shoulders to cry on, ears to hear the pain, and the collective wisdom we needed to heal from the trauma we all held. Like mentioned throughout this dissertation, the Fellowship became a space of healing. We all came to discover that we were holders of trauma—"an experience, or pattern of experiences, that impairs the proper functioning of the person’s stress-response system” (Supin, 2016)—and that the Fellowship, could be a space where we: (a) named our pain, (b) connected our pain, and (c) began to heal from it (Ginwright, 2010).

JJ held a lot of pain from her experiences—home, school, and the world did not seem to have faith in her. She wrote

I believe because of all the struggles [I] been through and all the doubt I have hear[d] from... family and... people that only knew me for ten second. But that's something I face every day... that's [sic] a part of what made me the person I am today. Where I don't [sic] really... trust anyone. But I work even hard[er] to prove people wrong that has doubted me in my... lifetime (JJ, Quarter 3 reflection, May, 2015).

Trust was a major point of friction in JJ’s previous relationships. She wrote

Before I walked in this space I didn’t really know who I was... I had a big problem with trust... Deep down inside I hated the fact they I always followed
someone else’s rules instead of stop[ping] people and say[ing] I know what I what to do for myself. . . . I believe deep down and inside that I actually found myself. . . . I’m an amazing mother . . . This job and the fellowship. . . showed me a lot of tru[th] from deep inside. (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015)

The Fellowship provided a context rooted in social justice praxis, that supported JJ’s agency, what she calls “truth from deep inside.” The space forced JJ to reflect on who she was and to reflect deeply and critically on the world. In that process, the Fellowship evolved into a space for the Fellows to come to terms with pain they held from their experiences in the world. The last week of the Fellowship, each Fellow created a video describing who they were before, and at the conclusion of the Fellowship. JJ’s video included the following written text (that I’ve transcribed here)

Working here has given me different opportunities to network with people, helped me become outspoken and comfortable in front of crowds. I learned a new way of learning and understanding. I’ve learned I can do anything I set my mind to. Most of all I’m a great mother that is sedulous/efficient, hard working & committed, and very productive when it comes to work being done!! I am who I want to be. And now I break every chain. (JJ, Who I Am, video, August 19, 2015).

By giving attention to the pain and stressors of their lives, the Fellows, like JJ mentions, grew “comfortable” in “who they were,” developing their capacities to “be outspoken” in their brilliance and contributions to rewriting the world. Processes like check-ins and dialogic inquiry into our lives helped the Fellows, Meghan, and I name and connect our experiences to one another—some painful—and our kinship relationships of love and care created a shared responsibility to respond to each other’s pain. The Fellows’ agency, the confidence to see themselves as capable makers of reality,
developed and transformed through experiences in the Fellowship. In “breaking every
chain” JJ was confronting the pain from her past that was preventing her from existing in
full humanity in, and on, the world. The Fellowship created a context for JJ to engage in
praxis, a methodology that would also help her to start healing from the pain of her past.

JJ’s past had a lasting impact on her emotional state. Deep relationships and a
curricular focus on mental health provided the processes and skills that helped JJ name
and connect her pain to the other Fellows. One day she wrote about how Shanika, one of
the Fellows who had to leave the program, supported her well-being in a more immediate
situation:

today started off an upsetting day for me. But once Shanika started explaining
what she was going through I really wasn't upset anymore. I..thought I was the
only person-facing problem dealing with trying to work and deal with different
things at home it was a moment that I need to see. (daily reflection, December 22,
2014)

Through listening to Shanika, JJ discovered that others had experiences similar to her
own. Knowing that she has someone to connect to, and with, provided the mechanism(s)
of support that JJ expressed a need for early in the Fellowship.

Naming and connecting pain were only part of the process of healing in the
Fellowship. The Fellowship evolved into a place where the Fellows developed a shared
praxis to deal with the pain in their lives. On one occasion JJ made mention of the stress
relief techniques she was learning from the Fellows and through her own study. After
leading the Fellows, Meghan, and I through a workshop on self care (that she led), JJ
used the stress relief techniques she taught us to make it through day:
I was very upset when I first made it to work. But my coworkers really did help me out a lot to calm down from my stress. And I used my stress teach us to help me a lot by listing to music. (daily reflection, March 23, 2015)

JJ was learning new coping techniques and she had a community of support along the way. Saying “my coworkers really did help out a lot to calm down from my stress” indicates that therapeutic nature the Fellows had with one another. Dr. David Supin (2016) says “If your living environment increases the probability that you will interact with your neighbor, it makes both of you physically healthier, socially healthier, and less likely to suffer the mental-health issues associated with being isolated and marginalized” (p. 8). The Fellowship provided the “environment” for “interaction” with the Fellows, who, in many ways, were “neighbors.” The Fellowship community, in itself, was a space of healing, where through interactions we were becoming “physically healthier, socially healthier, and less likely to suffer the mental-health issues.”

On other occasions, JJ’s agency impacted her healing. She was making the world a better place for others, but in doing so, she found ways to continue moving beyond her own trauma, healing from the pain of her past. Sharing her experiences with other mothers was healing for JJ:

I’m not as . . . scared to speak in front of a crowd of people. . . being in the fellowship I finally feel important…When I first begin the fellowship I said I want to help people that go through thing like I did. By me becoming a DCS worker I could help those that going through abuse and neglect. (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015)

Here JJ, through sharing her stories with other mothers, recognized her ability to educate others while also confronting her fatalism. Before she was “scared to speak” and through
the Fellowship, JJ found her voice. This serves as an explicit example where JJ was both demonstrating agency and starting to heal through the process.

The Fellowship filled a family void for JJ. As I mention in other chapters of this dissertation, we were a family: Papa Asif, TiTi Momo (Meghan), and the children (Fellows). In July, 11 months into the Fellowship, the Fellows presented at a conference in Oakland, California. Their topic, *Ecosystems of Love*, was an exploration of radical healing, what the Fellows likened to a “rose that grew from the crack in the concrete” (Shakur, 2009). More specifically, the Fellows shared how the Fellowship was a space of radical healing through their *Ecosystem of Love* (see Figure 15). The method of healing they prescribed was a pedagogy of love. They, like bell hooks (2000b) believed “love heals.”

![Figure 15. Ecosystem of Love](image)

---

**Ecosystem of Love**

**Leaves = Products of healing**

"Learning from the pain and the past, finding purpose and reflecting on your struggles to find strength for your community" (Pat Comangian).

**Trunk = Community**

"I've attempted to find ways to make students feel significant and cared about as well, to find space for their lives to become part of the curriculum. I do this by inviting them to write about their lives, about the words from which they come" (Linda Christensen).

**Roots =**

"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree with no roots" (Marcus Garvey).

**Rain = Things that help us grow.**

"Love heals. When we are wounded in the place where we would know love, it is difficult to imagine that love really has the power to change everything. No matter what has happened in our past, when we open our hearts to love we can live as if born again, not forgetting the past but seeing it in a new way, letting it live inside us in a new way. We go forward with the fresh insight that the past can no longer hurt us. Or if our past was one in which we were loved, we know that no matter the occasional presence of suffering in our lives we will return always to remembered calm and bliss. Mindful remembering lets us put the broken bits and pieces of our hearts together again. This is the way healing begins. (Bell hooks)"

**Soil = Society**

"Humans kind has not written the web of life, we are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect" (Chief Seattle).
JJ echoed this during her last interview with Meghan and me when she said: 

The biggest thing before Greenhouse was I felt like I lost my family. And I felt like with Greenhouse I gained it back. Even though its not like my actual family, it just a group of people that I could say for a fact love me. (Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

The Fellowship, evolved into an ecosystem of love, a space where the Fellows named their pain, connected their pain, and healed from some of the pain that inflicted wounds on their lives. Greenhouse Fellowship became a space of healing.

**Summary: JJ’s social justice praxis as a pathway to healing**

JJ’s evolving agentic identity is useful in better understanding the Fellowship’s influences on her agency and the relationship between JJ’s agency and her healing. As seen with the example regarding JJ’s role in reducing infant mortality in East Chicago, JJ’s comments, experiences, and push for the East Chicago hospital to be more inclusive are all examples of methods she used to influence the well-being of East Chicago parents and their children. Working with young mothers, many of whom reminded JJ of herself, to make their transitions to motherhood smoother, serve as further examples of JJ’s healing through praxis.

As she was engaging with other young mothers, that shared similar identities to her, and changing the structures of East Chicago (hospital services), JJ was both confronting the pain(s) of her past and starting her own healing through preventing and structural change. JJ believed that changing the methodologies of hospital services and access to those services would limit other young mothers from experiencing some of the painful experiences JJ experienced giving birth to her son. Speaking with other mothers, both empowered JJ—she was able to realize her brilliance, reversing the deficit identity
formed through her experiences in foster care and in school—and healed JJ—she was engaging in praxis—reflecting on her experiences as a mother and doing something about it. While these experiences did not heal JJ, they served as markers where her wisdom and experience served as catalysts for her addressing the pain(s) of her past through social justice praxis.

Through her experiences in the Fellowship, JJ began to critically read the world. Linking the expansion of the boat slips in her community to gentrification gave her the vocabulary, research skills, and body of evidence needed to empower herself and her community (see figure 16).

**Figure 16.** JJ’s agency development
These investigative experiences supported JJ’s observation of the world as unfinished, and furthermore, her role in re-writing it. JJ’s agency developed and changed throughout her experiences in the Fellowship; from a place of not being entirely clear about what activism was and what activists do, to a praxis that embodied social justice and a critique of hierarchy (Solórzano & Delgado-Bernal, 2001). As JJ engaged in a re-writing of the world, she was also healing from the traumas of her past. The Fellowship evolved into a space where the Fellows named, connected, and healed from their pain. Building confidence, having a dependable and supportive community of love, and her own action on the world were important characteristics of JJ’s healing. This is clear when JJ said, “I no longer let other speak for me I make my own choice now…from being in the Fellowship I finally feel important” (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015).

**Conclusion**

This chapter sought to unpack the how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship negotiated their agentic identities in the real world—a real world that often encouraged them to act within the normalized systems in place. To explore the Fellows’ emerging agentic identities, I presented a re-telling of the transformational journeys of two Fellows: Jaylah and JJ. By following their emerging and transforming agentic identities and perceptions I demonstrated that: (a) the Fellows brought into the Fellowship preexisting agentic identities, (b) the Fellows’ pre-existing identities of agency shifted over time through their experiences in the Fellowship, and (c) the Fellowship evolved into a space of healing as well as a space of social justice praxis.

All of the Fellows entered the Fellowship with previous experiences and perceptions of agency. In fact, they all made early mention of “helping people.” The drive to help people was not something the Fellowship cultivated, rather, the Fellows
developed these service identities prior to becoming Greenhouse Fellows. Faith, a week into the Fellowship, told everyone “I’m passionate about people in general. I want to be able to help people” (baseline interview, August, 2014). Juve defined helping people as “helping others like…give them something that they don’t have. Like if they don’t have clothes, give them clothes. Or if they don’t have food, provide them with a meal” (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014). Shawntay saw herself as a helper of people too, saying “who I [am now] is some[one] that is willing to help one or more people to not go through any of the obstacles I went through or help achieve the obstacles they are encountering” (Quarter 2 reflection, February, 2015). The Fellowship provided the Fellows the space to use these starting points—their identities of service—as catalysts, as assets, to future development and transformation.

The Fellows’ agentic evolutions, however, did not happen by themselves. Like mentioned in chapters four and five, and expanded in this chapter, context shapes agency. There are a variety of environmental factors (people, structures, discourses, beliefs) that influence the ways in which agency may be shaped. The Fellowship, in the case of the Fellows’ developing agency, created a context for the Fellows, Meghan and I to engage in social justice praxis.

To describe how the Fellows agentic identities developed over time, I presented factors of the Fellowship that may have contributed to the Fellows’ developed agency. Experiences, reflective practices, collaboration with the community and each other, the development of a systemic analysis, and a pedagogical focus on healing were all mechanisms of the Fellowship, that when utilized by the Fellows to engage in social justice praxis, developed and transformed their agency.
As the Fellowship progressed we (Meghan, the Fellows, and I) began to recognize the importance of centering healing in our praxis. We were learning new knowledge related to oppression in our world, and we were hearing other people’s painful stories—we needed to heal from pain that resulted from these stories, whether we experienced them or were just hearing about them. Our inquiries and dialogue both unearthed and brought up new understandings of the importance of healing in our work:

I think because without healing like, you can’t be you. If you don’t understand why you feel the way you feel it, its just its not you. So, I want everybody to be them[elves]. Even though the world is all messed up I’d rather we heal from the situation then sit there and be depressed and traumatic, traumatized. And I would like to be somebody that helps you go through that’ (Shawntay, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015).

Through dialogue, the fellows were able to name their pain. Once we named our pain we were able connect our pain. This helped us to better understand that we weren’t alone in our struggle. Dialogue in the Fellowship provided the Fellows with the context to engage in this healing process. The following exchange between Meghan and Juve may provide evidence of dialogue’s impact on the healing process:

Meghan: How has it [the Fellowship’s interactive setting] set you on that path to heal?

Juve: I don’t know. I guess by…giving me more knowledge and giving me the opportunity to reflect on myself and what I want and how to get there. I never actually reflected on my life or who I am or where I want to be. So, being granted that opportunity actually made me get that way, or take that path. (Juve, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)
Jaylah named the Fellowship as a detox, where she was able to heal from the conditioning of society:

I think Greenhouse Fellowship is like the perfect place in between high school and college because it helps you like, not really erase the things you learned from school, but like better examine those things and kind of like, examine more into what you learned in school and why you learned those things and..see that not everybody learned those things that you learned in school. Or maybe learned more than what you learned. And you only learned a specific thing for a specific reason I guess…So Greenhouse Fellowship is like a detox in between school and college. (Jaylah, Quarter 4 interview, August, 2015)

Overall, the Fellowship was not just about engaging in social justice praxis, it was about healing too. Ginwright (2010a) reminds us that healing, as a form of care, can be a political act that “encourages youth to heal from the trauma by confronting injustice and oppression in their lives” (p. 56). As evident in JJ’s agentic transformation presented in this chapter, engaging in social justice action helped her release the trauma she held. Additionally, the relationships and processes of the Fellowship (check-ins, teach us activities, seminars and readings on healing) provided contexts that supported the naming of pain, connecting that pain to the experiences of others, and healing from it through praxis.

While the Fellowship had an impact on the Fellows’ emergent activist identities, this chapter demonstrates that every Fellow had agency within them prior to the start of the Fellowship. The Fellowship did not present activism as a foreign object that the Fellows could embody. Rather, the Fellowship served as a context for the Fellows to develop and transform the agency that they always held.
Chapter 7—Implications, limitations, open questions, and next steps

Implications

The examination of cases like Greenhouse Fellowship adds to the breadth of research on agency development, popular education approaches, and teaching and learning. It also may lead researchers towards the development of theories of youth agency development applicable to the 21st century and a deconstruction of post-racial and neoliberal rhetoric that has permeated the fabric of U.S. society. Because case studies are contextual, bound to a specific space and time, I hope that readers take away components of this study that they find useful to explore in their own settings.

This research study has four major implications:

• In this moment, youth and schools can be catalysts to a (re)writing of the world;
• teaching is more than teaching; it is a political act grounding in praxis;
• research is praxis; and
• popular education needs structural support.

In this moment, youth and popular education contexts can be catalysts to a (re) writing of the world.

Youth in the 21st century must navigate a world of limits and possibilities. Neoliberalism has created an infrastructure of individualism and competition (Harvey, 2005), post-racial ideologies have manufactured the belief that race no longer influences limits and opportunities in life (Cho, 2009), and the “urban trifecta” (Ginwright, 2010a) has erased visible social movement organizing in many urban cities across the United States.
However, the actions of people and organizations have long served as markers of possibility. Organizations like the Black Youth Project 100 serve as examples of people critically reading and (re)writing the world. Additionally, teachers and schools continue to act as facilitators of liberation, working within oppressive structures to create space for critical praxis. Freire (1998) reminds us that “education...is a form of intervention in the world”. While it can serve as “an instrument for the reproduction of the dominant ideology” it can also be “an instrument for unmasking that ideology” (pp. 98-99).

As this dissertation highlights, there is a space that exists between the structures of society (e.g. racism and poverty) and agency (acting on one’s own behalf) that I define as the contours. Contours function to serve as local landscapes that enable and restrict agency, and they can change over time. Popular education contexts, like Greenhouse Fellowship, can create spaces for youth (and adults) to discover the world and themselves as unfinished and promote a humanizing action on the world. The Fellows were able to be activists, doing activism, through critically examining the world and doing something about it. They were, through deep political study of their lives, able to recognize themselves and the world as incomplete and engage in action to move towards the completion of their lives.

The Fellowship created opportunities—through praxis—that supported the Fellows’ recognition of their and the world’s unfinishedness. Throughout the year, role models expanded our understanding of the world and our role in re-writing it. Guest speakers, readings, movies, community members, and the study of social movements and events provided the Fellows with examples of both the people and the processes, in the past and within the time period of the Fellowship, which could be used and replicated in the Fellows’ work in East Chicago.
The Fellowship evolved into a context of healing, where activism and wellness intersected. Because we all were holding pain, and experiencing more as we learned about oppression in the world, we had to develop mechanisms to both name and start the process of healing from our pain. Like I demonstrate in JJ’s narrative, as the Fellows were engaging in social justice praxis, on issues relevant to them, they were, in some cases, navigating the pain from their past. The Fellowship did not heal the Fellows, rather, it provided a context for them to name, connect, and engage in social justice praxis that started the process(es) to move beyond their pain.

Additionally, the relationships and responsibilities we built with, and for each other, led us to focus on each other’s well-being. The Fellows shared their self-care and stress-relief strategies during Teach Us; check-ins provided us the space to name and connection our pain to others; readings and guest speakers gave us the cognitive understanding of trauma, the brain, and healing and our projects, among other experiences, became a method to dismantle oppression in East Chicago, limiting the possibility of more pain for others. Healing and activism should be seen as two interconnected aspects of identity. The Fellows’ agency, in many cases, was in relationship to their healing.

This dissertation also highlights the need for young people to re-think their conceptions of activism. When youth do not have specific examples of what can be done, what is being done, and what has been done to limit oppression in their lives, they may adopt fatalistic views of the world (Freire, 2000; Ginwright, 2010). This limited exposure to radical activism creates room for acceptable form of activism, which may have influenced the Fellows’ early perceptions and understanding of activism. However,
experiences in the Fellowship offered them the dialogic and reflective space(s) to make sense of their early perceptions, in some cases shifting them.

Faith described her new conceptualizations of activism when she said

Before Greenhouse. . . I guess I had like the savior theory too. . . I always said that I was going to change the world, but until Greenhouse I have realized that for me to change the world, its not just going to be me changing the world. Like, yeah you see Nelson Mandela and you see Martin Luther King. . . . But they never did that by they self. Like all the people, guys in the background helping them, all the connections that they had, all the networks that they made. . . . before I always was just thinking that this, that me being that Martin Luther King, but I never really considered everybody else that would be involved in that and how to deal with them. . . before Greenhouse I always thought of relationships as mastering dealing with people. Like how can I deal with you in a way that you can’t even tell that I’m dealing with you. Like instead of really just working with you. And its totally different. . . Like. . . you can’t just deal with people. It’s more than just putting up with something. When you get past “I’m just doing this to do this” to “I’m doing this for us.” Let’s all work together for this. (Quarter 1 interview, November, 2014)

Here Faith recognized that collective groups make history, not necessarily single actors. Additionally, she came to understand that her activism is not just benefitting other people, but also herself and her community. By impacting the well-being of one, Faith believed she was also impacted the well-being of herself and others.
Teaching is more than teaching. It is a political act grounded in praxis.

The six-pillar framework of the pedagogy of risk I describe has implications for the role of educators working in and out of schools. Each of the pillars serve as reminders of the power educators hold to determine processes and set contexts for teaching and learning. The six pillars of the pedagogy of risk and their interconnections (chapter 5) can serve as the foundations to constructing these processes and contextual factors. I hope that a pedagogy of risk can support other educators implementing popular education methodologies in and out of school settings. The framework presented used students’ lives, classrooms, and communities as conduits by which teachers can develop curriculum and re-sharpen their pedagogy. It is my hope that this framework can be (re)conceptualized and (re)contextualized in many educative spaces—from in-school classrooms to out-of-school community spaces.

Each of the six pillars—relationships, relevance, revolution, recognition, responsiveness, and reflection—demonstrate that the role of the educator, at least the educator in a popular education context, goes far beyond “the disseminator of information.” The pedagogy of risk serves a pedagogical starting point to interrupt the status quo. All educators should be mindful to construct deep relationships with their students as a method to better understand their assets and starting points. We should start teaching and learning experiences from a point of relevance, familiar to the lives and queries of the students we work alongside. Education is a political act (Freire, 1970). Educators should see themselves and their pedagogies as weapons of liberation. They should support their students’ agency development to empower them to be change-makers; I am not supporting a “teacher-as-savior philosophy” here. Understanding that young people are the holders of trauma, educators should be considerate of their...
responsibility to create contexts for students to name, connect, and heal from their pain.

Finally, education is praxis, not just pure action. Reflection on our actions as educators is a crucial component of a pedagogy of risk.

The six pillars of the pedagogy of risk may support educators (re)conceptualizations of their role(s) in and outside of classroom settings. U.S. schools have historically and overwhelmingly been sites of indoctrination, serving as an extension of the State’s efforts to maintain order and control amongst dispossessed people while also being spaces where educators and others have always resisted these oppressive forces. Liberatory educators, or those interested in moving away from the oppressive structuring of schooling, may find a pedagogy of risk useful in their classrooms—constructing ways to use in and out of school spaces as sites of (re)imagination. A pedagogy of risk may create sites where students can explore their lived realities, develop analytical tools to better understand the structures of oppression and liberation existent in their lives, and engage in a re-imagining and a re-writing of the world.

**Research is praxis.**

Much like the role of the teacher, as both teacher and learner, implications from this study can inform the role that researchers take in their queries. Both Critical Race Praxis (Yamamoto, 1996) and a problem posing pedagogy (Freire, 1970) call for research grounded in praxis—where researchers act on the responsibility to engage in reflection, action, and symbiotic work that meets the needs of the research participants and their communities. Far too long have communities of color been “researched” with no reciprocity in return (Tuck, 2009). This study hopes to add to the emergent ethical considerations related to the framing and conducting of research. As researchers develop
and implement their research studies, they should develop an understanding of how collaborations with communities can lead to more contextually appropriate modes of inquiry that benefit all parties involved, not just the researcher(s).

This case study blurs the lines between researcher and participant. Although I engaged in the Greenhouse Fellowship space as an employee, and not a researcher primarily, I believe that researchers have a responsibility to utilize their expertise to meet the needs of the participants, and the needs of the communities they work in. Seen through this lens, one that sees the researcher as a facilitator of a community’s wants and needs, research can become a tool of resistance and agency in itself, providing communities with a space “in which individuals and communities can work more collaboratively toward realizing their human potential” (Irrazary & Brown, 2014, p. 65).

Researchers should be mindful of the benefits of adopting identities that position us as both insider and outsider. Insider identities can strengthen relationships to people and the places we conduct research in. Additionally, an insider researcher identity may support useful research (Wilson, 1979) that ensures the participants and their communities gain from the research too. Outsider positionalities may be beneficial in two ways. One, they help us, as researchers, separate ourselves from the research setting, providing the solitude to “engage in object of knowledge” (Freire, 1970). Secondly, positioning oneself as an outsider may prompt us to include the expertise of insiders in our analysis. This (re)positioning of power may create the context for participants to act as researchers and researchers to act as participants, blurring the lines between the “researcher” and the “researched.”

I also believe that it is the responsibility of the researcher to examine the relationship between deficit-orientations of communities as “in need of” or “lacking” and
the resources that communities hold and use, to combat these deficit notions. Researchers should look to better understand and document how communities are coming to terms with oppression in ways that highlight their brilliance, collaboration, and agency. I intentionally position this research as “desire-based, refusal research” (Tuck & Wang, 2014). It seeks to reverse the centering of pain; a commonly used positioning of the “research subject” in traditional social science research. This is not to say that the stories presented in this dissertation were all centered on positive experiences, but rather, the Fellows’ pain, nor disadvantages, were not painted through deficit-based lenses.

**Popular education needs structural support.**

This research study took place in a context that was financially supported and where I was left with a great deal of autonomy to make local decisions. There are structural implications here. Had we not had funding to support the salaries for the Fellows or had more organizational boundaries placed on what we could and could not do, the Fellowship would certainly have evolved differently.

While I’m not necessarily arguing for every student doing this work to be paid, I am calling for the adequate resourcing of popular education projects. Teachers need the freedom to explore the possibilities of this work, students need the time and space to do this work, and institutes need material and pedagogical resources that will allow them to engage in a reading and (re)writing of the world.

**Limitations**

There are several identified limitations related to this dissertation. They are detailed as follows:
**Research setting.**

Because this research was not done in a school setting, and I hope that this work can contribute to the work done in and out of schools, limitations in applicability may exist. Schools come with many structures and systemic barriers that may not even allow for this work to occur. Future studies should look closer at the relationship between in and out of school settings, particularly how the strengths of either setting can assist in the well-being of the other. However, this may not necessarily be true. Some school settings, may, and in fact do, encourage the critical praxis of popular education.

**Research participants.**

This study only focused on the five fellows that completed. Data from those that left could have nuanced my claims and hunches. However, the Fellows that departed were, in a sense, included in this study. Every time a Fellow left, regardless of the rationale, Meghan and I (sometime alongside the Fellows) reflected on the ways in which the Fellowship and our leadership could have influenced their departure. Meghan and I used the reflective space to unpack our positionalities and to better understand what it meant to work alongside young people. Our pedagogy of risk was informed by all of the Fellows, those that completed the program and those that departed.

**The use of archival data.**

This research, for the most part, used archival data collected as a part of the participants’ employment. As a result, the data collection processes and tools were not set up to capture data for research purposes. There may be holes in the stories and processes captured because of limited data.

Over three years passed between the Fellowship experience and the writing of this dissertation. This long span of time may have limited this study in two ways: the data
collection and analysis did not necessarily occur concurrently (see chapter 3), and I, as the researcher, have forgotten many of the contextual factors that could have been useful during data analysis. Finally, while there were many data sources created by the research participants themselves, there were not reflective archival data sources from the administrators. Neither Megan nor I kept a reflective journal during our year in the Fellowship space. These reflections could have been useful in better understanding and recollecting the occurrences of the research setting from the adults’ perspective.

**Time span of study.**

This was not a long-term study. As stated in Chapter 4, changing the structures in the world may be life-long work, a year could not have captured the possibilities and barriers to creating structural change in East Chicago. However, the one-year time span helped to paint the picture of the role educative contexts, and adults, play in shaping agency.

**Individualizing activism.**

While it was our (Meghan and I) intention to facilitate a praxis that moved us away from individualized analyses towards more systemic ones, the emphasis on people, as opposed to the movement building they did, may have contributed towards the Fellows’ individualization of activism—seeing activism as activists doing things. They often defined activism as individual actions. While this is not a major limitation of this study, it highlights the individualized nature of society and the work and time required to deconstruct this conditioning.

**Researcher positionalilty.**

Acting as an insider may have created an additional limitation. As an insider, I may have been, at times, too close, in relationship and experience, to the data; this may
have impacted how I came to see the data. The participants of this study and I had authentic relationships that stemmed beyond the traditional researcher relationships. I still am in contact with them often and consider them part of my family. Because of the relationships I have built with them, I found it difficult to step back and observe them through the data, as opposed to my relationship and experience with them. This is not to say that I manipulated the data, but rather, a statement of the emotional connectivity I had to protect the stories of the participants in ways that do not contribute to the exacerbation and reproduction of deficit ideologies related to the research setting or youth of color. While I claim that these positionalities might be limitations they also serve as identified were strengths to this research (see insider/outsider discussions).

Open Questions

There are several open questions emerging from this dissertation study.

**How does this work translate into school settings?**

Greenhouse Fellowship operated outside of the traditional schooling structure. The Fellows were paid a salary and, among others, we worked out of an office and not a school building. Our space looked different and was not bound by the structures of schooling (Anyon, 1980; Bowles & Gintis, 1976, Giroux, 1983); particularly as they relate to the in-school experiences of students of color (Kozol, 1991). Future inquiry should focus on how the work of popular education translates to school settings, connecting and nuancing the findings presented here.

**How do adults and youth do this work together? Long term?**

This dissertation explored the role of the educator and the Fellows in isolation to some degree. It did not, at least to the level of in-depth analysis, observe and analyze how youth and adults collaboratively engaged in praxis. Youth and adults have long
participated together in social movements (Kelley, 2014), but there is a tendency in the academic arena to separate the work of youth into a category of their own—as if education research is somehow void of youth voice, analysis, and experience. Greenhouse Fellowship no longer exists. It remains unknown what long-term relationship the Fellowship will have on our (the Fellows, Meghan, and I) agency. As noted in my discussion on “shifting contours” (Chapter 4), transforming society may consume an entire life time. More long-term study into the developing agency of youth and adults, working collaboratively, engaged in popular education methodologies should occur in the future.

**Researcher identity.**

As my first major academic exercise, I found it difficult to navigate between my identity as researcher and my identity as a research participant in this study, especially because my voice (as told by me) was absent in much of the data. While I acknowledge the ways in which I am both in this research setting, the dual identity complicates the writing process within an academic ideology that has conditioned me to remove myself from the writing. Questions of researcher positionality still remain. What does it mean to position oneself as both an insider and outsider and how do I write into that during my research? What does it mean to engage in participant research where the researcher is researching themselves?

**Agency and healing.**

More research in recent years is emerging on the impacts of trauma on the stress-response systems of youth (Ginwright, 2010; 2015; Supin, 2016), and schools are beginning to implement processes of social and emotional well-being (Ginwright, 2015). This dissertation discussed the relationship between healing and agency in minimal ways.
More attention should be given to study these relationship between agency and healing in the future. More specifically, I am interested in better understanding contexts, and the processes, where young people and adults name, connect, and through social justice praxis, engage in a process to move beyond their pain. I am also interested in better understanding what long-term impact these healing processes and contexts have on young people as they emerge into adulthood. How do youth maintain, or not, their identities of agency as they grow into adulthood, navigating the complexities of the world?

Next Steps

In future studies I hope to investigate several queries that emerged from this study.

**Follow up with the Fellows.**

Five and ten years after the Fellowship, I plan to conduct follow-up interviews with each Fellow. This is an effort and commitment to continue to understand their developing agentic identities over an extended period of time.

**Exploration of other contexts re-inventing Freire.**

I am interested in studying places and educators re-inventing Freire’s work. I would like to continue exploring and analyzing popular education iterations across multiple contexts. I am particularly interested in how popular education is emerging in k-12 schools and in pre-service teacher education programs.

**Healing in and out of schools.**

I have developed a growing interest, through my experience in the Fellowship and in creating this dissertation, to learn more about trauma and healing. I am particularly
interested in documenting how in- and out-of-school settings are using brain science and healing methodologies (Ginwright, 2015) to create contexts for youth to name, connect, and healing from the pain of the lives. I am also interested in documenting stories from other educators that have adopted healing frameworks in their social justice contexts, in and out of schools. Finally, I want to conduct more research to better articulate, and expand, the connections between agency and healing. This dissertation surfaced the connection, but more in-depth study is needed.

**Researcher as insider/outsider.**

I am interested in further exploring the role of researchers as both insiders and outsiders. How do I add my voice and narrative into academic writing as a participant, as data? What does it mean to approach research navigating the insider/outsider dialectic?

**Contours and agency.**

In future studies I hope to continue exploring the relationship between societal structures and agency—what I call contours. More attention should be given to the exploring how context influences agency, adding more empirical evidence to support, or deny, my early conceptions of contours.

**Closing Statement**

I believe that, as others before me (Cammarota & Fine, 2008; Darder; 2015; Ginwright, 2010a; 2015; Ginwright & James, 2002; Ginwright, Noguera, & Cammorota, 2006; hooks, 1990) have mentioned, the emancipatory theories and methods within Freire’s problem-posing pedagogy can create contexts that support young people’s explorations of the world, critical analysis, and action. These liberatory contexts may also help them to discover their own sense of agency—their ability to develop and implement change. Freire urged his readers to not simply import his methods into
liberatory spaces. Greenhouse Fellowship was a space that attempted to re-invent Freire, making sense of his work through the context of a post-industrial city in the 21st century. 

Because the study of agency development and popular education approaches in the 21st century US context are fairly new, there is a need to further investigate the stories emergent from spaces that use popular education approaches with youth in this particular moment we sit in. This work, in addition being a contribution to the field, represents my own transformational hopes for the world. Like Freire, I too see my work to be “but one small contribution to [a] long historical struggle for freedom” (Darder, 2015, p. 127).
Cited Literature


*Journal of Applied Psychology, 63*(2), 197.


Greenhouse Fellowship (2015a). *Bringing Opportunities to Our Kids (B.O.O.K.)*


New York, Emerson Hall.


Kuzawa, C., & Sweet E (2009). Epigenetics and the embodiment of race:


Latins present demands to Indiana school officials. (1970, October 29). *The Chicago
Tribune. Retrieved from:


Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What’s race got to do with it? Critical race theory’s conflicts with and connections to qualitative research methodology and epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry, 8*(1), 7-22.


Twine, F. (2000). Racial ideologies and racial methodologies. Racing research, researching race: Methodological dilemmas in critical race studies, 1-34.


Appendix A

Approved UIC IRB consent to participate

---

University of Illinois at Chicago
Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research
Epistemologies of youth activism in the 21st century

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Asif Wilson, Ph.D candidate
Department and Institution: Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois at Chicago
Address and Contact Information: 1040 W. Harrison Street, Chicago, IL 60607; 312-996-4508

Why am I being asked?
You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about examines the relationship(s) between activism development in young people and their participation in programs aimed at nurturing activism.

You have been asked to participate in the research because you completed, or supervised, a year-long Fellowship program that was rooted in Paulo Freire’s popular education approach.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Approximately six subjects may be involved in this research at UIC.

What is the purpose of this research?
This research is interested in exploring:
1. how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship made meaning of their lived realities using research.
2. how the youth of Greenhouse Fellowship viewed themselves and the world.
3. how the adult-facilitators—both administrators and guests—in Greenhouse Fellowship created youth spaces of activism and how they facilitated this process.

What procedures are involved?

Consent Document for Epistemologies of activism, Version #2, December 4, 2016, Page 1 of 4
This research will be performed at a public place convenient for you.
You will not need to come to the study site at all over the duration of this research.

By consenting to participating in this study you agree to:
1) allow the primary investigator, Asif Wilson, to access all of the employment documents relevant to your employment at Greenhouse Fellowship and any work your created during your employment at Greenhouse Fellowship. These documents include employment records, your written reflections and narratives, and audio recordings from your quarterly interviews.
2) periodically, on two occasions over the next year, give feedback to the primary investigator, Asif Wilson, on his research findings.
3) if applicable (if you are the adult supervisor), participate in two interviews where I will ask you questions about your experiences. These interviews will take place in a public location comfortable to you.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?
To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. A risk of this research is a loss of privacy (revealing to others that you are taking part in this study) or confidentiality (revealing information about you to others to whom you have not given permission to see this information).

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?
Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but I, the principal investigator, may learn new things that will help others.

What other options are there?
You have the option to not participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

Consent Document for Epistemologies of activists, Version #2, December 4, 2016, Page 2 of 4
The only person who will know that you are a research subject is the principal investigator. Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare (for example, if you are injured and need emergency care or when the UIC Office for the Protection of Research Subjects monitors the research or consent process) or if required by law.

Study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you will be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by: UIC OPRS.

A possible risk of the research is that your participation in the research or information about you might become known to individuals outside the research. All of your personal information, research data, and all other related records will be stored in a locked location. Any information presented or produced as a result of this study will be de-identified—your real name will be removed. During the initial stages of data analysis your name will be replaced with a pseudonym and that pseudonym will be used for the duration of the research study. All identifiable data from this research study (identifiers, codes, master lists) will be destroyed by the principal investigator at the conclusion of the study, or after data is de-identified (whichever comes first).

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. The people of Greenhouse Fellowship will not know who participated in this study and it will not affect any relationship you have with Greenhouse Fellowship.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Will I be reimbursed for any of my expenses or paid for my participation in this research?

You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. If would like to terminate your participation in this study you can call me at 773-663-6292 or email me at awilso1@uic.edu. There are no consequences if you decide to withdraw from this research. You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

The Researcher also has the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if I believe it is in your best interests.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact the researchers Asif Wilson, Ph.D candidate, at 773-663-6292 or email address: awilso1@uic.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research. Because I am a student you can also call this research’s faculty sponsor, Eric Gutstein, Faculty, at 312-413-2410.

Consent Document for Epistemologies of activism, Version # 2, December 4, 2016, Page 3 of 4
What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

__________________________  __________________________
Signature                          Date

__________________________
Printed Name

__________________________  __________________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent  Date (must be same as subject’s)

__________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Consent Document for Epistemologies of activism, Version #2, December 4, 2016, Page 4 of 4
Appendix B

Interview Protocol (from quarterly Fellow Interviews)

1. What is going well with the fellowship?

2. Describe a moment in the field that has impacted your view on the world?

3. Do you tell other people about the theories you have developed as a part of the fellowship? Tell us about a time when this happened?

4. What are you getting out of seminar?

5. Describe a memorable moment in seminar.

6. What would you improve in GHF?

7. Are you an activist?

8. Is there a difference between being a fellow and being an 18 year old?

9. What is democracy?

10. Do you see yourself changing East Chicago? How?

11. What have you been thinking about lately?
**Daily Work Plan template**

Date ______________  Group Members Present ________________________________

1. Objectives (what do you hope to complete today?):
   - ____________________________________________________________________
   - ____________________________________________________________________
   - ____________________________________________________________________
   - ____________________________________________________________________

2. Accomplishments (what did you do today?):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Assigned group member</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Preparation for whole group meeting (what are you going to tell/ask the group?):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Results of conversation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are you going to tell the group?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What questions are you going to ask the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anything else you need to talk about?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Next Steps (for the next meeting)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Assigned group member</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D

Guidelines for creating a newsletter entry

Guidelines for creating a newsletter entry

Name: The Fellow Focus

Purpose:
- The purpose of the newsletter is to inform the community about what fellows do and think. It is also to inform everybody of the changes that happen within the fellows’ in relation self, theories, community, and action.

Contents of a newsletter entry
1. Picture: please include a picture of your story. Also include a caption
2. Title: Try to keep it short and catchy. Check out the newspaper for inspiration.
3. Your name: make sure you get credit for the work you do
4. The narrative:
   a. Include the 5 W’s (who, what, where, when, and why?).
   b. why are you writing about this?
   c. why are you informing the reader?
   d. what do you want the reader to do? The answer could be theoretical.

Length
- This is not an essay. Don’t bore the reader. We are looking for short articles, less than 250 words. Be sure to be succinct with your writing and hit all the major points. Remember, you may have readers in other states so tell all the important facts.

Choosing a topic (see Newsletter guidelines—choosing a topic)

Schedule
Week 1
   Monday: Submit hard copy of first draft
   Monday: Editors will review and hand back. If editors can’t meet this requirement they will hand them back the following Friday.

Week 2
   Monday: Final draft will be due the following via email.
   Tuesday: Morgan and Asif will put newsletter entries into Mail Chimp.
   Wednesday: Newsletter will go out every other Wednesday morning.
VITA

ASIF WILSON
1050 W. Hubbard, Unit 1C, Chicago, IL, 60642 | (773)-663-6292 | asif_wilson@yahoo.com

EDUCATION

University of Illinois at Chicago
Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction 2018
Dissertation Title—Winter in America: Exploring epistemologies of youth activism in the 21st century
Areas of concentration: pre-service teacher education, teacher education, popular education, community-school relationships, youth resistance and agency, praxis, curriculum development, justice-centered teaching and learning, and participatory action research.

University of Illinois at Chicago 2010
M.Ed. in Educational Studies
Areas of concentration: participatory action research, historical context of Black education, middle school teaching and learning, and critical science education.

University of Illinois at Chicago 2008
B.A. in Elementary Education
Area of concentration: special education

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Harold Washington College 2016-present
Instructor – Intro to African American Studies
Developed syllabus and overall course structure, and administered all grades for undergraduate level courses on: (a) the relationship between Black Lives Matter and state violence and (b) Fanon as a framework for critiquing and reimagining schools.

University of Illinois at Chicago 2013-2014
Instructor – Intro to Urban Education
Developed syllabus and overall course structure, and administered all grades for foundational undergraduate level course for pre-service teachers.
Responsible for forming relationships with local community organizations and placing, monitoring, and evaluating students for required service hours.

University of Chicago 2013
Adjunct Instructor – Critical Analysis of Key Issues in Urban School
Developed syllabus, overall course structure, and administered all grades for graduate level course for pre-service teachers.
VITA

University of Chicago

Adjunct Instructor – Justice-Centered Teaching in Urban Schools
Developed syllabus, overall course structure, and administered all grades
for graduate level course for pre-service teachers.

Columbia College Chicago

Consultant
Developed various professional development activities related to
integrating the arts into traditional classroom spaces.

Chicago Public Schools

May Community Academy

Classroom teacher (7th/8th grade) – Science and Social Studies
Developed, implemented, and assessed science curriculum for 7th/8th
grade. Developed, implemented, and assessed social studies
curriculum for 5th/6th grade.
Student leadership committee chair.

ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Harold Washington College

Associate Dean of Instruction
Member of President’s Executive Council.
Part of college-wide 22-member administrative team.
Supervised three staff: two Instructional Design Managers and one
   Director of Academic Support Services.
Department Chair—Interdisciplinary Studies. Oversaw course
development,
assignment, and assessment for three courses and ~25 sections per
semester.
Oversaw Online Learning for entire district (seven campuses).
   Online Learning administered almost 300 course sections for
   over 6,000 students per semester.
Managed developmental education reconceptualization in
   Mathematics and English. Included program and curriculum
design, implementation, and assessments.
Chair of Community Outreach committee.
Coordinated the design of First Year Experience (FYE) programming.
Served as criterion three co-chair for Higher Learning Commission
   (HLC) reaccreditation.
Led professional development for faculty, staff, and administration
   on pedagogical best practices.
Coordinated and conducted a variety of qualitative and quantitative
course, initiative, and program-level assessment.
VITA

Harold Washington College

Director: Academic Support Services, Academic Initiatives

Part of college-wide 30-member administrative team.
Facilitated developmental education course sequence redesigns in mathematics and English developmental education courses.
Coordinated summer bridge program (Level Up) for new students including recruitment of participants, hiring of staff, and program assessment.
Developed, implemented, and assessed holistic, socio-emotional, curriculum for students and faculty.
Coordinated the design of First Year Experience (FYE) programming.
Co-chair of the Diversity and Inclusion Committee.
Served as criterion three co-chair for Higher Learning Commission (HLC) reaccreditation.
Coordinated technological-enriched mathematics laboratory.
Conducted a variety of qualitative and quantitative evaluation related to teaching and learning.

Greenhouse Fellowship

Executive Director

Developed, implemented, and assessed year-long fellowship program for recent high school graduates.
Developed, implemented, and assessed year-long curriculum (~900 hours) for recent high school graduates.
Developed, implemented, and assessed four professional development sessions for participating social service agencies.
Oversaw and facilitated development, implementation, and assessment of youth-driven Participatory Action Research projects.
Developed and implemented comprehensive assessment protocol to measure both direct impact of program and personal identity development of staff.
Balanced a ~$500,000.00 operating budget.
Oversaw day-to-day operations.
Managed a staff of 10; 9 Fellows and 1 Associate Director.
Developed, implemented, and assessed fundraising campaigns.

ADDITIONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Indiana Humanities

Consultant

Developed interdisciplinary curriculum for 6-12 grade students rooted in story-telling, data collection, analysis, and inquiry to action.

University of Illinois at Chicago

Pre-College Leadership and Impact Program
VITA

**Coordinator and Facilitator**
Developed and implemented a two-week leadership program for high school junior and senior Black males aimed to diversify the teaching profession.

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Chicago Teacher Partnership Program (CTPP)

**Academic Coach**
Provided academic, social, and emotional support to freshman and sophomore students enrolled in the teacher preparation program.

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Chicago Teacher Partnership Program (CTPP)

**Embedded Faculty**
Acted as a liaison between the grant supervisors and participants through the sharing of best practices, development of new initiatives, and attending monthly meetings with representatives across the four participating institutions.

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Collaborative for Educational Justice and Equity (CEJE)

**Researcher**
Participated in data collection, analysis, preliminary reporting efforts, and final report construction for research documenting parents’ perceptions of school closings.

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Collaborative for Educational Justice and Equity (CEJE)

**Lead facilitator**
Provided facilitation of on-site and off-site youth participatory action research projects aimed at placing youth in teacher roles in an effort to create a pipeline of urban teachers of color.

University of Illinois at Chicago  
Content Learning and Identity Construction (CLIC) Research Project

**Researcher/Participant**
Participated in data collection, analysis, and preliminary reporting efforts for research investigating science and math identity construction and content learning.

Chicago Grassroots Curriculum Taskforce  

**Curriculum Developer**
Part of a collaborative of curriculum specialists designing, publishing, and implementing k-16 curriculum related to Chicago history.
VITA

Coalition to Revitalize Dyett High School 2013-2015

**Design Team Member**
Part of a coalition of community members and curriculum specialists that designed a plan and official proposal for the re-opening of Dyett High School.

Columbia College Chicago 2012

Transforming Education through the Arts and Media (TEAM)

**TEAM Fellow**
Inquired into, enacted, assessed, and modeled best practices for transforming traditional classroom spaces into spaces of multimedia production.
Lead author on research publication.

University of Illinois at Chicago 2010-2013

Chicago Teacher Partnership Program (CTPP)

**Teacher Liaison**
Served as liaison between May Community Academy and University of Illinois at Chicago.

University of Illinois at Chicago 2011-2012

College of Education

**Mentor Teacher**
Served as mentor teacher for student teachers entering into their clinical instruction.

PUBLICATIONS AND PAPERS


VITA


PRESENTATIONS

City Colleges of Chicago Faculty Development Week (2017): Workshop
“A pedagogy of risk: Six pillars of teaching and learning”

“Building a people’s education movement: Strategies for movement building within and across local struggles”

Institute for Teachers of Color (2017): Workshop
“There Can Be No Racial Justice Without Gender Justice: Confronting Heteropatriarchy in People of Color Movement Spaces

“WE ARE STILL HERE: Building a people of color-led ethnic studies movement in Chicago”
VITA

“Major Key Alert: Bringing wellness into the classroom”

City Colleges of Chicago College Success Training (2016): Presentation
“Major Key Alert: Why integrating wellness into the classroom is critical”

Digital Media and Learning Conference (2015). Equity by Design: Presentation
“Co-constructing spaces of love, equity, and justice with youth re-writing the future of a post-industrial city”

Free Minds Free People (2015): Workshop
“Constructing youth-led spaces of decolonization, radical healing, and love”

“Looking within: Tackling injustice in pre-service teacher education”

National Association for Multicultural Education (2014). Dismantling Fronteras through Multicultural Education: Con Cummunidad, Cariño, y Coraje: Workshop
“Critical multicultural education for preservice teachers in urban contexts”

“Building critical curriculum on Chicago’s schooling and education”

Indiana University (2014). Inaugural Sustainable Civic and Community Engagement Conference: Presentation
“Youth as actors on their worlds”

Chicago Teacher Partnership Program (2014). The Road Ahead: Multiple Voices for Tomorrow’s Educators: Keynote Address
“Preserving democracy as tomorrow’s teachers”

“Developing justice-centered, thematic curriculum”

“Teaching for social justice”

Neighborhood Schools Fair (2013): Workshop
“Teaching for social justice”

University of Illinois at Chicago annual research day (2013): Paper presentation
“Content Learning and Identity Construction”

Columbia College Chicago (2013). Summer Institute: Workshop lead
“Critical consuming in classroom spaces”
VITA

Columbia College Chicago (2013). Summer Institute: Workshop lead
“Using students’ lived experience as pedagogy”

“Using students’ lived experience as pedagogy”

Chicago Curriculum Studies Student Symposium (2013): Presentation
“Using students’ lived experience as pedagogy”

“Blogging as counter-narrative”

MEMBERSHIPS

Teachers for Social Justice (Chicago): Leadership Core
Ethnic Studies Collaborative for Educators of Color (Chicago): Founding member
Teachers of Color Collaborative (Chicago): Founding member
Rebel Bells (Chicago): Curriculum designer

AWARDS

Making Achievement Possible, University of Illinois at Chicago 2013
Inspiration Award, Christ the King High School 2012
NASA Heliophysics Ambassador, May Community Academy 2011