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What Does It Mean to Be a Service-Learning Teacher? - An Autoethnography

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What Does It Mean to Be a Service-Learning Teacher? – An Autoethnography

by

Kristy C. Verdi

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in
Social Science Education
Department of Teaching and Learning
College of Education
University of South Florida

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February 27, 2017

Keywords: personal interpretive framework, service-learning course, middle grades
education, relational care, self-authorship

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Russ. I could not have completed it without his love and support. He has believed in me since the beginning, and that has meant more to me than anything. Russ, you have been waiting to hear the words, “I’m finished” for a very long time and I cannot wait to give them to you, and mean it. I also want to thank my sons, Zack and Tucker, for their patience, support, and forgiveness for all the hours I was on the computer. Thanks also to my mother and father for believing in me and providing words of encouragement over the years of my extended education, and to other family members, friends and colleagues who helped me along the way. With my work, I wish to honor my longtime mentor, Dr. David Dugan.

June 13, 2016

Dear Dr. D.,

I wish I could be there today to say goodbye, Dr. D. As I told you a few years ago, you inspired me to pursue a Ph.D. I want so badly for you to see me walk across the stage. Last week, when I found out about your passing, I broke into sobs. My husband immediately ran to me, fearing something awful has happened to my mom or my dad. After I calmed down and told him about your death, I told him it was selfish of me, wanting a professor to live long enough to see me graduate with a Ph.D.! My husband knows, though, how much you mean to me, and he assures me that you would want to be there if it was at all possible.

It all began as a coincidence. I, an undergraduate new to West Georgia, have yet to declare a major. You told me during our first advisement session I was “stuck with you.” That statement, followed by your unique, silly giggle, a high-pitched happy sound that I still recall today. How grateful I have been that we were stuck together! You recognized that I needed an advisor in life more than in academics, and encouraged me to make my own decisions. “Well, that is just something you will have to decide, isn’t it?” was your standard reply to all of my indecisiveness, and it was always followed by your little giggle.

I witnessed the influence you had on so many young people. We all enjoyed your classes so much. You encouraged me to get involved in college and then professional life, and I thrived. When I left West Georgia and started working in the field, we stayed in touch. I was always so happy to see you at the annual Parks and Recreation conference, and you were always interested in hearing about my successes in the field. When I moved into education, our communication was rare, but we talked on the phone once or twice over the years and exchanged a few letters. I called you when I entered the Ph.D. program at USF. I was so proud and wanted you to know how you have influenced me.

I wanted to tell you one more time. Thank you for being there for me. I am sad I could not be there today. So, this dissertation is in your honor, Dr. D.

Sincerely,

Kristy Causey Verdi

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables	v
List of Figures	vi
Abstract	ix
Cast of Characters	1
Introduction.....	2
Chapter One: Having a Purpose, Seeing a Need.....	8
The Problem.....	10
My Conceptual Framework	12
Rationale	14
Purpose.....	16
Guiding Questions	16
My Method.....	16
Definition of Terms.....	17
Service-Learning.....	17
Service-Learning Teacher	18
Regular, Normal, or Traditional Teacher.....	18
Randall Area Youth Service (R.A.Y.S.) Council	18
Stages of Steps of Service-Learning	18
Assumption	18
Significance of the Study	19
Organization.....	20
Chapter Two: My Investigation	21
Service-Learning.....	22
A Brief of History of Service-Learning	22
Defining Service-Learning.....	24
Educational Theory behind Service-Learning	27
The Practice of Service-Learning	29
Investigation.....	31
Planning/Preparation.....	32
Action.....	32
Reflection.....	32
Demonstration/Celebration	32
Service-Learning Teachers	33
Middle Level Education.....	36

Service-Learning and Middle Level Education	37
Civic Engagement in the Middle Schools.....	39
Adolescent Development, Service-Learning, and Civic Engagement.....	40
Relevance.....	41
Responsibility	42
Belonging.....	42
Awareness.....	43
Engagement.....	44
Competence.....	44
Ethics.....	45
Active Learning Pedagogy.....	45
Middle School Teachers	46
Conclusion	48
 Chapter Three: Planning & Preparation.....	49
My Study.....	52
Why Autoethnography?	53
Engaging Kelchtermans.....	56
Self-Narrative Autobiography	60
Emerging Conversations with Critical Friends	62
Archived Materials.....	65
Merging and Melding: Searching for I and Writing for You.....	67
Quality.....	69
Ethical Considerations	70
Limitations	71
 Chapter Four: Action – My Lived Experiences.....	73
Interlude One	75
Creating a Service-Learning Classroom	76
Cared For	86
Growing Pains.....	90
Hurdles.....	95
9/11/2001	98
8 Years Later.....	101
15 Years Later.....	108
Fighting Cancer, Raising Hope.....	109
Purpose.....	111
Reaching Out	114
Empathy	116
Catie	119
Presenting the Past, Moving into the Future.....	122
Interlude Two	124
Learning to Lead.....	124
College	125
Love	128
Parks & Rec	131

Motherhood.....	134
Learning to Teach	139
Seeing the Service in Learning	146
Interlude Three.....	151
Classlessness	152
A Challenge	154
Memorial Day	158
Epilogue	163
Chapter Five: Reflection Through Conversation.....	165
What Does It Mean to be a Service-Learning Teacher?	166
It's Not a Job.....	166
Empathy to the Nth Degree.....	168
Care and Moral Development.....	169
Teaching with Purpose.....	171
All About Students.....	173
Uniquely Motivated	175
What Experiences Shape the Personal and Professional Development of a Middle-School Service-Learning Course Teacher?.....	178
Cared For	178
Creativity.....	179
Self-Authored.....	179
What Learning Occurs in the Service-Learning Classroom?	182
Moral Education and Self-Understanding	183
Real World Experiences and 21 st Century Skills.....	186
Life-Long Learners	189
Leadership and Responsibility.....	190
Chapter Six: Demonstration.....	193
Overview of the Problem and the Purpose	193
My Personal Interpretive Framework	195
Overarching Findings.....	197
An "I Must" Care Perspective.....	197
Committed to Community	201
Self-Authorship.....	203
Servant Leadership.....	204
Contributions	206
Implications	207
Future Research	207
Epilogue	210
References.....	213
Appendices.....	234
Appendix A: Permission to Use Figure Four.....	235
Appendix B: Permission to Use Content for Table 2	239

Appendix C: Permission to Reproduce Table 3 and Figure 5	240
Appendix D: District Approval for Research Study	241
Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter	243
Appendix F: Initial Invitation to Participate	245
Appendix G: Informed Consent.....	247
Appendix H: Informed Consent – Revised Edition	250
Appendix I: District Approval for Extension of Research Study	253
Appendix J: IRB Extension Approval	254
Appendix K: Permission to use image from Alpha Gamma Delta, Inc.	256
Appendix L: Permission to use Gwinnett Daily Post news article	257
Appendix M: CITI Human Research Curriculum Completion Report	258
About the Author	End Page

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	A Cast of Characters in the order they appear	1
Table 2:	Service-Learning Typology	25
Table 3:	K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice	30
Table 4:	What is a Middle School Service-Learning Teacher? Overarching Findings.....	198

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Trash-To-Treasure Project	4
Figure 2: Hillsborough County “Building Strong School Culture” Logo	5
Figure 3: Mrs. Verdi making important announcements	8
Figure 4: Components of the Personal Interpretive Framework.....	13
Figure 5: NYLC IPARD Framework.....	31
Figure 6: Verdi’s adaptation of Kelchtermans’ procedures.....	60
Figure 7: Archived Materials from the Service-Learning Class	66
Figure 8: RAYS first scrapbook	78
Figure 9: Differentiating Wants and Needs Activity	79
Figure 10: In TLS, students collect or school’s recyclable materials	80
Figure 11: Bonnie and George often lead instruction in our class as well as in other classrooms.....	81
Figure 12: Tolerance and Diversity Bulletin Board.....	83
Figure 13: Daily DO NOWs are usually quick writes based on quotes or student-created prompts	84
Figure 14: Reflection statements are longer and are aimed at capturing the social and emotional growth of students.....	85
Figure 15: Magnets with students’ names are easily moved and aligned to tasks each day	86
Figure 16: Ready to run at ten months.....	88
Figure 17: Easter dresses and beehive hairdo	88
Figure 18: Receiving the Service-Learning Leader School banner.	91

Figure 19: Directing Spider Web class activity	93
Figure 20: Family photo just before divorce.....	95
Figure 21: First Patriot Day Memorial display: Front view	104
Figure 22: First Patriot Day Memorial display: Back view	104
Figure 23: New markers for Patriot Day.....	105
Figure 24: View from atop my car Sept. 11, 2011.....	107
Figure 25: Preprinted marker	108
Figure 26: Biography of a firefighter.....	108
Figure 27: Learning about the Amazonian Rainforest.....	112
Figure 28: Learning about pirates and other cultures while serving at Relay For Life.	113
Figure 29: Workshop activity: Cards	114
Figure 30: Workshop Activity: Easter bags.....	114
Figure 31: Student talking with elderly resident.....	116
Figure 32: Residents showing off placemats	116
Figure 33: Sorority marketing pamphlet.....	127
Figure 34: Dr. D and I on our last visit together in June 2014	128
Figure 35: Mr. and Mrs. Victor R. Verdi, January 24, 1987	130
Figure 36: Zack, age 8, and Tucker, age 4.....	136
Figure 37: One of many family baseball weekends.....	137
Figure 38: The long and narrow portable interior.....	144
Figure 39: I took Tucker to a food bank for National Family Volunteer Day	149
Figure 40: Eleventh graders teaching fourth graders about Manifest Destiny	150
Figure 41: Students teaching students.....	155

Figure 42: Students put up the Memorial Day display	159
Figure 43: Della's son.....	161
Figure 44: Elementary schools participated in this year's display.	162
Figure 45: Joan invited us to visit her school in 2009	181
Figure 46: Components of the personal interpretive framework	196
Figure 47: Profile of a middle school service-learning teacher	209

ABSTRACT

This personal narrative autoethnography of my lived experiences as a middle-school service-learning course teacher has helped me solve a personal mystery and present an important perspective for the K-12 service-learning field. With an eye on revealing a unique service-learning classroom concept to educational leaders, enhancing middle level teacher education, and hopes of providing greater opportunities for advancing research on service learning in K-12 education, this study has also aided me in understanding my professional self and my subjective educational theory through a personal interpretive framework (Kelchtermans, 1993, 1999, 2009). Using autoethnography (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2006) as a method to explore my own experiences as a middle school service-learning teacher and the perceptions of critical friends—colleagues, family members, and friends—who have been significant in my experiences, I am able to present an evocative personal narrative on what it means to be a service-learning teacher. Overarching findings from this study reveal that a middle grades service-learning teacher is a self-authored individual (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2009; Kegan, 1994) who is committed to community-engaged education (Dewey, 1900, 1933), possesses a strong “I must” (Noddings, 2002b, p. 20) perspective on relational care, and are for development in servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977; Sergiovanni, 1992; Bowman, 2005)

Keywords: personal interpretive framework, service-learning course, middle grades education, relational care, self-authorship, servant leadership

A CAST OF CHARACTERS

Table 1: *A cast of characters in the order they appear.*

Kristy	me, author, primary researcher
Kay	middle school principal
Bonnie	former student who participated in exploratory wheel class and two years of academic elective class; served as Class Co-Leader in her 2nd year
George	former student who participated in exploratory wheel class and two years of academic elective class; Veterans/Military Affairs Committee Chair in his 2nd year
Allison	composite student character
Mitchell	composite student character
Veronica	composite student character
Charlotte	composite student character
Sonny	school bookkeeper and friend
Mom	my mother
Dad	my father
Helga	Social Studies teacher, friend and colleague
Zack	my oldest son
Tucker	my youngest son
Josie	Social Studies teacher, friend and colleague
Russ	my husband of 30 years
Tony	Language Arts teacher, friend and colleague
Grace	Science teacher, friend, colleague, and mother of Bonnie
Marie	mother of four former service-learning students
Barbara	student intern
Joan	middle school service-learning teacher in neighboring district (now retired)
Dee Dee	middle school service-learning teacher in neighboring district

INTRODUCTION

“The form will evolve during the research process. You might start the dissertation with a short personal story, to position yourself for the reader” (Ellis, 1999)

I remember the conversation quite clearly. I sit with my principal, Kay, in her office; she, behind a neatly organized desk; and I, across the way in a comfortable chair. It is silent; her suggestion still hangs in the air, “Why don’t you take a year off and just be a ‘regular’ teacher?”

She is looking at me with such care and concern; and I am looking back at her with crocodile tears threatening to flow down my cheeks. After a moment more, my answer comes out with a soft sob, “I can’t.” Another moment goes by; and then, more firmly, “I can’t!”

“But why?” she asks. “Why can’t you just *not do* service-learning?”

After another long moment, I reply, “I don’t know.”

That was almost five years ago. I was quite overwhelmed. Teaching three periods of seventh-grade geography, two sixth-grade service-learning exploratory classes, and one seventh-and-eighth-grade service-learning elective made for a long day. Both the exploratory and elective courses are products of my creativity and both curriculums are emerging on a day-by-day basis. Additionally, I am driving one night a week to a college campus an hour away for class and using my other evenings to read, research, and plan for all of the above. I have a loving husband and two children, both boys, in high school who are supporting me in all of my endeavors. Somehow, I am managing to keep them happy and healthy as well. Life is stressful and, occasionally, when my energy is depleted, I become emotional. It is at one of these points

that Kay asks me to step into her office to discuss the next school year. Hence, the crocodile tears.

So how did I get to this point, trying to understand why I do not want to stop complicating both my personal and professional lives by engaging in a practice that is not even expected of me? At any point in the last eighteen years of my twenty-four-year teaching career, I could have gone the route of the “traditional” teacher, and no one—*no one*—would have asked me why I stopped using service-learning in the classroom or why I chose to stop teaching the service-learning class. As a matter of fact, Kay would think I had finally come to my senses.

The honest truth is service-learning finds me. It finds me as a sixth-year teacher who is struggling with student indifference, boredom, and a substantial lack of motivation in the classroom. I am teaching world history to suburban teenagers who are only concerned about Friday night’s party plans. It is disconcerting, even downright depressing at times. I owe my thanks to the dreary, drizzly rain of Georgia. It makes walking to class a miserable proposition for students and teachers alike. It is the slippery, muddy walk from the main school building to my portable classroom every day that ultimately sets the stage for my career as a service-learner. My students find purpose in their world history education by literally paving the way to our outdoor classrooms with hand-painted, historically-themed pavers that are the product of our lessons on the four ancient river-valley civilizations (Figure 1). Excitement spreads throughout the school, and other teachers and students sign on. My students become service-learning project leaders for the entire school. Only afterwards did I learn we have conducted a “service-learning” project. Although it will take time for me to fully understand what service-learning is, one of the first definitions I find exposes the nature of this growing, multi-faceted educational practice. Billig (2000) writes:

While disagreement about the definition of service learning persists, there is general consensus that its major components, as practice, include active participation, thoughtfully organized experiences, focus on community needs and school-community coordination, academic curriculum integration, structured time for reflection, opportunities for application of skills and knowledge, extended learning opportunities, and development of the sense of caring for others. (p. 659)

While I realize I did not address all components, I am definitely attempting to do service-learning, and I like it.



Figure 1. The Trash-To-Treasure Project - Images from my first service-learning project.

Now, seventeen years later, I find myself facing a new task, a greater challenge. After service-learning finds me, I find in it a way and means to teach young adolescents the things in life found in few middle school classrooms: leadership, collaborative teamwork, compassion, empathy, the responsibility of civic engagement, and uses for much of the content and knowledge students collect in their other courses. The service-learning class gives learning purpose. And just as I am getting it right, I am losing it. While this story is about my lived experiences as a service-learning course teacher, I cannot ignore that I am no longer that teacher.

The course has been eliminated because it is a stand-alone course; it is the only one in our district; and I, the only teacher. There is no way to evaluate me in comparison to others and no district-created exam to evaluate my students. So, after seven years, the course is no more.

I want it back. After months of frustration and fruitless grumbling, I take my argument to the top, our district superintendent. Our district has, as have many others, identifies service-learning as a component needed to build positive school culture (Figure 2). There is little question that the practice of service-learning is of benefit to our youth. Service-learning is considered to be a part of our nation's education fabric; however, it is unfunded and lacks leadership in most schools and districts. It looks nice in a district's mission statement, but who is responsible for implementing it?



Figure 2. Hillsborough County “Building Strong School Culture” logo (2015). Adapted from <http://www.sdhc.k12.fl.us/newsdesk/article/350/hcps-prepares-for-phase-ii-gibson-report-workshop>.

In a face-to-face forum, I am able to ask this question of our school superintendent: “What is your plan for integrating service-learning into the culture of our schools?” (K. Verdi, Personal Communication, Dec. 16, 2015). I explain about the demise of our service-learning class. I share that the class provides the leadership for our school-wide service-learning program. The superintendent states that he will look into the reasons why it has been eliminated and how we can possibly restore the course. Several months go by, but I eventually get word that I will be contracted to write a district course curriculum so that the class can be restored. This is awesome news. But it also returns me to questions I have long had about myself as a service-learning teacher and the course itself. If I successfully produce a course curriculum, will anyone else besides me want to teach it? What is a service-learning teacher?

I want to know what it means to be a service-learning teacher. I want to know what experiences shaped me into this teacher. I want to be able to demonstrate that my students learn something of value. Regardless of whether the class is ever restored, my story can help define the personal traits and professional abilities of teachers as potential candidates for becoming a middle school service-learning course teacher. I also want the course to expand to other schools and to be sustainable once it is established. Seeking to restore the course might be a personal goal, but I also see its great potential for improving the culture of any school, but particularly at the middle level.

I have a story to tell. It is about me as the initiator and teacher of an academic elective course for middle-grade service-learners. It is not about a teacher who does a service-learning project, although I might encourage a few to try one. It is about a teacher who prepares students to teach other teachers and students how to assess community needs and use academic knowledge and skills to meet those needs.

For seven years, I teach a class of service-learners how to be service-learning leaders. It is a leadership course framed by service-learning; and, while it is my greatest joy as a teacher, it is also the greatest challenge I have ever faced—a challenge I am sorely missing now and want back.

CHAPTER ONE: HAVING A PURPOSE, SEEING A NEED

“Bonnie, can you describe a great day in service-learning class?” I email one of my former students. I get a response within the hour

A great day in service-learning class: Everyone is focused and working efficiently throughout the entire class. Everyone gathers their binders and "DO NOW" journals right when they walk into class. Mrs. Verdi gets in front of the class and updates us on any new information about any projects, maybe gives a short lesson about service learning (Figure 3). We get into our project groups and delegate the tasks that need to be accomplished that day. We stay focused and get things done for our assigned service-learning projects. If we need help or have a question, we ask a classmate or research it ourselves (exhaust all options BEFORE going to Mrs. Verdi). That is a great day! Miss you! Bonnie.

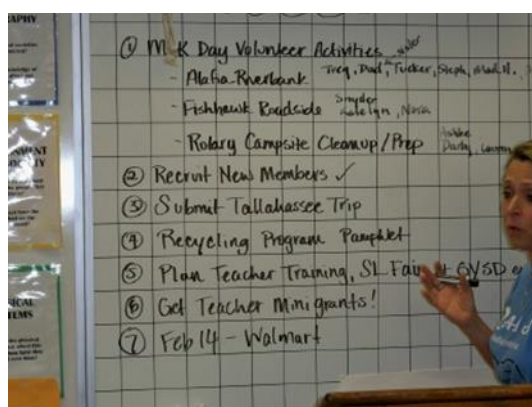


Figure 3. Mrs. Verdi making important announcements

“Thanks, Bonnie!” I reply. “Ah, if only every day was a great day in service-learning! I miss you, too!”

I send another email to George with the same question.

“George, can you describe a great day in service-learning class?” I write. He replies:

Hey Mrs. Verdi, I'd have to say our best days were ones where we had explicit goals to achieve and we did it. Whether it be to research on specific topics or brainstorm for specific ideas, it was the goals that made those days the most successful. Hope that helps, George.

“Thanks, George!” I write back. “That definitely helps! Hope to see you soon.”

I know I need to ask for the flip-side, the bad days, and I will. I will need these two to really let me have it, and they will. We have talked a great deal over the years since they have both moved on to high school and then college. They both have tried to help me make improvements to the course, solve management issues, and develop potential service ideas. They have also shared their successes with me and I am so very proud of them. They remind me why I do what I do.

I want to capture and analyze my personal narrative for a few reasons. First, I want to share my serendipitous experiences from the past seven years to inform other educators about instituting service-learning as a middle-grade course of study. My narrative presents the unique prospect of a classroom dedicated to developing young adolescents into community and civic leaders. In sharing my lived experiences as a service-learning classroom teacher in a detailed and evocative narrative, I may educate curriculum gatekeepers, administrators, and teacher educators about the concept of service-learning as a middle level pedagogical framework.

Secondly, I wanted to identify the unique qualities, characteristics, and essences of a service-learning teacher to delineate any distinctive similarities or differences from what my principal identified as a “normal teacher.” What drives me to see the world through a service-learning lens? Lastly, I wanted to identify and explain what I saw happening in my classroom so that I can more clearly define the learning conditions, be they social, emotional, ethical, or purely academic, so that educational leaders can begin to understand the value of a service-learning course for the students in the classroom as well as the school and surrounding community.

The Problem

From 2009 to 2011, funding and resources from Learn and Serve America, a program of the federal Corporation for National and Community Service, add support for a youth service-learning council I started in 2007. The purpose of the council is to assist teachers with planning and implementing service-learning projects. Once I receive the grant, the council assumes the function of managing mini-grants to teachers who are engaging students in service-learning projects. I learn about a school district that has successfully established service-learning elective classes. I broach the topic with my principal and, in 2009, I have my first class of middle-school service-learning leaders.

My students learn about service-learning and then carry the strategy into multiple classrooms in our school and into the community. The grant funds enable the service-learning students to purchase materials for various projects as well as pay for teacher substitutes and transportation to service sites. When the funding ends in June 2011, the class continues with the materials we have remaining, purchasing new materials by holding local fundraisers, through small donations from local businesses, and through small grants awarded through student-written applications. Fellow teachers assist by covering classes, and transportation costs are defrayed by

choosing sites to which parents are willing to drive. In theory, I find the class can survive without Learn-and-Serve funding as long as my principal is willing to allow me the Full Time Equivalency (FTE) point to teach it and as long as the district allows the principal that discretion. In order to establish a class, hypothetically, a local school needs only identify a course code, a classroom, and a teacher.

In reality, the teacher is the heart of the endeavor. As Don Hill notes in his 2010 essay, “Death of a Dream Service-Learning 1994-2010: A Historical Analysis by One of the Dreamers,” schools once known widely for exceptional service-learning classes stop offering service-learning when individual teachers leave the school or “burned out” and became “normal” teachers (p.2). Although I am not at the burn-out stage, I realize that I do not understand how to be a normal teacher. In addition to that notion, I fear that if I quit no one else will take on the class. I cannot do that to my students. Before I leave the position, I need to know that someone will take my place. Who will that person be? What do we look for in a replacement?

There is a distinct lack of research on service-learning courses, service-learning course teachers, and the learning conditions in the service-learning classroom. Studies have been done on teachers who used service-learning as an instructional strategy, but there is a gap in the research in regards to those who teach a class based on service-learning. Lofgran (2004) looks at factors that facilitate and hinder service-learning as an instructional strategy in elementary and middle-school classrooms; however, the focus is on comparing veteran teachers’ and novice teachers’ experiences when they first implement the strategy. Likewise, Krebs (2006) explores the motivations of K-12 teachers to do service-learning, but the projects and programs the participants conduct are one-time or short-term uses of the practice. Cochran Holmes (2013) conducts a phenomenological study seeking the essence of the service-learning teacher in middle

grades, but participants are leading service-learning activities in regular education classrooms, not utilizing a service-learning framework in a service-learning classroom. A study of the experience of a teacher leading a course framed around service-learning is missing.

My Conceptual Framework

This research study invites readers to walk with me as I explore my “personal interpretive framework” (Kelchtermans, 1993, p. 447) or the lens through which I perceive, give meaning to, and act in my work situation at school. As I compose this autoethnographic study, my attention will be on a set of conceptions about myself as a teacher and my personal system of knowledge and beliefs concerning teaching, being a teacher, and being a service-learning teacher (Janssens & Kelchtermans, 1997).

Kelchtermans’s (1993; 2009) personal interpretive framework refers to a set of mental actions or cognitions that operates as a lens through which teachers perceive their professional work. Figure four provides an overview of the framework. This conceptual framework guides my interpretations and actions in particular contexts or teaching situations. The personal interpretive framework, which consists of two components, the “professional self” (Kelchtermans, 1993, p. 8) and the teachers’ “subjective educational theory,” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p.263) forms a framework for understanding the teachers’ professional development. The professional self is my conception of myself as a teacher using a narrative biographical approach. My narrative will constitute a viable perspective for understanding my professional development from the subjective viewpoint of self and those around me.

Kelchtermans (2009) uses the term “self-understanding” (p. 261) referring to one's self at a certain moment in time during an ongoing process of making sense of one's experiences and their impact on the self. The narrative character implies one's self understanding only appears in

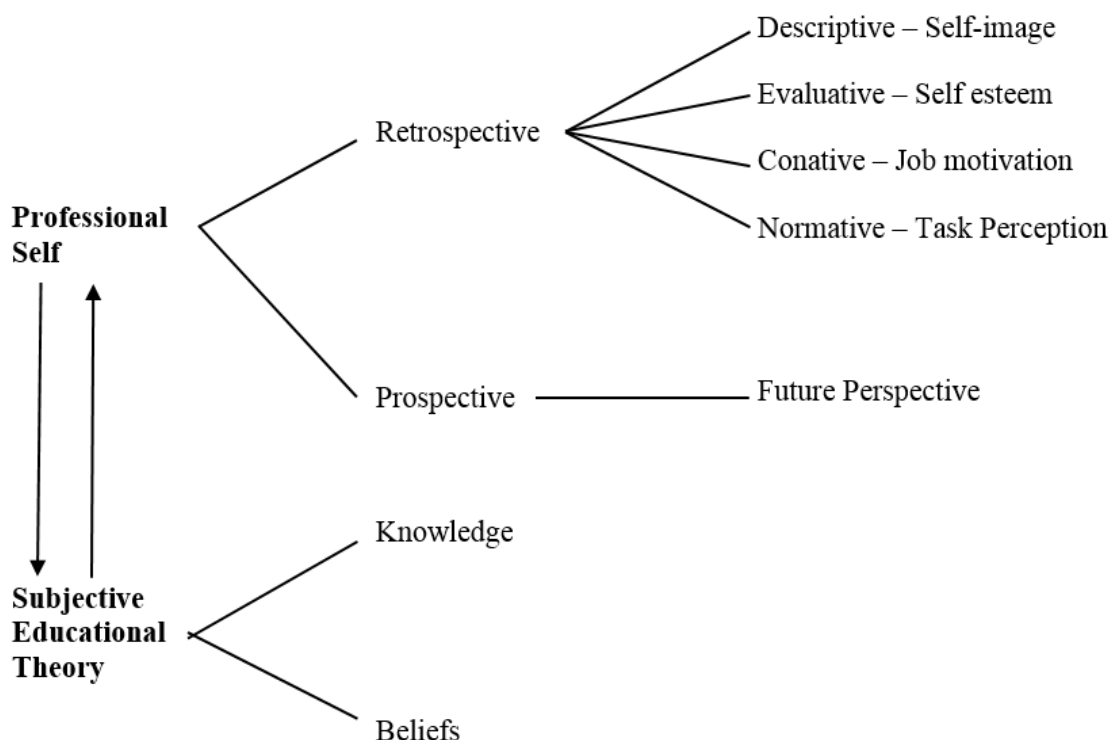


Figure 4. Components of the personal interpretive framework (Kelchtermans, 1993, p. 448, reproduced with permission; see Appendix A).

the act of explicit self-reflection. Kelchtermans's (1993) analysis identifies five components that together make up teachers self-understanding through retrospection: self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective. These five components are all intertwined and make reference to one another. In this way, self-understanding is an inclusive and distinguished concept reflecting a dynamic nature and situatedness of each teacher's sense of self. This narrative account of my self-understanding will be an interactive process as I invite the reader to confirm or question and contradict my statements of self-understanding.

The "subjective educational theory" (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 263), the second concept of the personal interpretive framework, is a personal system of knowledge and beliefs about education that teachers use when performing their job. Kelchtermans recognizes the

phenomenon he labels subjective educational theory has been called differently by other authors, namely, “subjective theory” (Mandl & Huber, 1983, p. 98), “implicit theory” (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 7), “practical knowledge” (Elbaz, 1981, p. 43), and “personal practical knowledge” (Clandinin, 1986, p. 121), among others, and that adding another label may contribute to a further proliferation of concepts rather than contributing to synthesis and theory building. Yet, he felt the risk of identifying yet another conceptualization was practical because subjective educational theory, as a label, “explicitly includes some of its essential characteristics: it is an ordered, more or less systematic whole ‘theory’ of knowledge and beliefs, constructed by the person involved (subjective) about ‘education,’” (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 270, notes).

Kelchtermans (2009) reiterates that professional self-understanding and subjective educational theory are intertwined in the interpretive personal framework. The personal interpretive framework is “simultaneously modified by and resulting from meaningful interactions with the environment” (p.261). It is both a condition for and a result of the interaction and represents the “mental sediments” (p.261) of teachers’ learning and developing over time. It is the lens through which I explored my experiences, my sediment, as a service-learning teacher.

Rationale

As teachers, it is our professional duty to find the methods that help our students learn best. When a student engages in and learns from academic lessons because there is purpose in the lessons, the teaching strategy is effective. “The perceived purpose of doing something—a course of action—is hypothesized to be a primary factor in determining the individual's level and quality of engagement” (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, p. 294). It is my contention that our young

people, with purpose in mind, can create solutions to community issues while they learn required curriculum in the classroom.

According to Marks (2000), critics have accused schools of providing meaningless instructional activities that disillusion students about the value of school. Students often witness their work (papers, projects, etc.) filling the trash cans at the end of the semester, hours of hard work worth nothing in the end. Without purpose, lessons will not transcend the classroom. Service-learning motivates students to learn based on a goal or a purpose and students who are more motivated to learn and more engaged in school have been found to perform better academically (Furco, 2013). Therefore, veteran and novice educators need to be inspired to place purpose at the forefront of instructional decisions as they seek to teach curriculum.

In turn, school leaders need to consider a service-learning elective course as a space to initiate and lead service-learning opportunities that support adolescent development as well as academic connections. There is a profound need to foster the middle level students' sense of belonging and to help them develop caring connections. The service-learning course prepares students to provide peer support and positive engagement opportunities, and establishes those caring connections that are incredibly important at this developmental stage.

Last but not least, teacher educators need to recognize and nurture pre-service teachers who demonstrate the qualities of a service-learning leader. In order to identify a potential service-learning leader, we must first identify these qualities. By identifying what it means to be a service-learning teacher, careful thought can be given as to practicum and internship situations that will nurture and prepare pre-service teachers in that role.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to capture and analyze my experiences as a middle-school service-learning course teacher and to explicate the learning conditions that are created in the service-learning classroom. My objectives are to construct a biographical perspective of myself, my personal and professional development, and a narrative explanation of my subjective educational theory. The product of the study may function as a tool in service-learning teacher preparation and as a catalyst to expanding the conversation around middle-grades service-learning opportunities in a standardized-assessment age. I am living an exceptional experience that I want to better examine and share. While service-learning is most often used as an instructional strategy within a course, it is the basis for the content, the curriculum, and the conceptual framework of my distinctive service-learning leadership course.

Guiding Questions

In this autoethnography, primarily as a personal narrative, I seek to explore my experiences as a service-learning teacher to answer the over-arching question: What is a service-learning teacher? I am using the following guiding questions:

1. What does it mean to be a service-learning teacher?
2. What personal and professional experiences shape a middle school service-learning teacher?
3. What do students learn in a middle school service-learning classroom?

My Method

I choose autoethnography as my method because my personal experiences as a service-learning teacher are unique in the teacher world. My subjectivity, with interpretations by my critical friends, family members, and friends who are associated with my development as a service-learning teacher, is key to developing an understanding of the larger context of teaching

in a service-learning framework. I view my lived experiences as the phenomenon, and, with a talent for writing evocatively, I find this method provides me with the perfect place to use my story to help in defining the uniqueness of a service-learning teacher. I have so many precious moments that I want to share about my students and my classroom. Using autoethnography, I not only get to share my memories evocatively through story, but I also make and remake myself as a teacher and as a researcher. Berry (2016) says this “transformation of subjectivity” is possible from the identity negotiation that is inherent in autoethnography (p. 22). I find the value in autoethnography is that I get to share my special memories and learn from them at the same time.

According to Ellis (2004), “autoethnography overlaps art and science; it is part *auto* or self and part *ethno* or culture” (p. 31). This process is therapeutic but also allows others to experience my experiences and creates the opportunity for extending the conversation about service-learning. The method allows me to utilize the conventions of storytelling based on my experiences and the outcomes that define a service-learning teacher. It proves to be an avenue for me to order my evolution as a service-learning teacher and articulate the implications of this research in the field of service-learning.

Definition of Terms

Service-Learning

A teaching and learning strategy integrating meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2011).

Service-Learning Teacher

For this study, that is an individual teaching a course in which service-learning is the primary focus and the pedagogical framework for instruction, and whose students learn the stages and standards of the practice and carry out service-learning projects as a means of learning and assessing academic skills.

Regular, Normal, or Traditional Teacher

Whereas this term is used most often in education to differentiate teachers of special-needs or gifted students, for this inquiry it is used in reference to a teacher who utilizes pedagogical practices that support learning but exclude service to the community. Traditional teachers have defined subject areas, which are outside service-based pedagogical frameworks, as the content they are required to teach.

Randall Area Youth Service (R.A.Y.S.) Council

For this study, R.A.Y.S. Council represents the middle school service-learning academic elective course. Council members are students in the course.

Stages or Steps of Service-Learning

As defined by Kaye (2010), the five steps in the service-learning model are: investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration or celebration. That model is often referred to as I.P.A.R.D.

Assumption

The overlying assumption I make in the research is that quality service-learning is good for students. While multiple sources on the positive impact of service-learning are addressed in the literature review, there is an indication by many leaders in service-learning research that huge gaps exist on proven impact. This is not a study on student impact but on teacher experience.

The ontological assumption present in this study comes from my reflexive self-narrative and the conversations I conduct with my critical friends. Epistemologically, my study is from "first-hand knowledge" (Creswell, 2007, p. 18) as I serve as both a participant and as the researcher. By my positing a reality that cannot be separated from my knowledge, my values are inherent in all phases of the research process, and reality is negotiated through discourse with my critical friends (Cohen, 2006). Because qualitative research is inherently "value-laden" (Creswell, 2007, p. 18), it is my axiological assumption that the values I present are my own.

Significance of the Study

This inquiry provides information on the issues teachers encounter when using service-learning as an instructional strategy particularly on major school-wide projects. Further, it is also a review on the support systems needed to have a service-learning classroom and provides a profile for those seeking to find the right teacher for such. At the same time, it contributes to the larger body of knowledge relates to middle school teachers who use service-learning, the reasons why they choose to use it in middle-level education, and how it can be used to create a course framework for service, civic engagement, character education, and leadership.

Learning how a service-learning classroom works may have a profound effect on attracting educators, administrators, and district leaders to consider creating such opportunities. This study intends to be beneficial to the National Youth Leadership Council as they seek to support the expansion of service-learning in K-12 education. It is grounded in research that supports service-learning as a positive factor in student achievement and social-emotional behavior development. Service-learning also has great potential as an instructional practice for the Common Core Standards.

The significance relates to the larger issue of collecting more and better-quality data about service-learning. This is critical to help the practice establish its credibility as pedagogy and its legitimacy as a reform strategy. Billig (2000) states that with more and better research “the passion with which practitioners pursue service-learning and believe in its outcomes can be supported in more conventional and data-based ways” (p. 663). Furthermore, this study can be beneficial to higher education programs preparing future educators for our classrooms. By deconstructing the experiences of a service-learning classroom teacher to analyze the qualities that drive her, educational leaders can also make improvements in teacher-education programs that teach service-learning as a potential instructional strategy.

Organization

My Introduction and Chapter One develop my purpose in completing this study, presenting the need for this research. The remainder of this project is organized based on the aforementioned K-12 service-learning model, IPARD. Chapter Two represents my investigation phase. In this section, I provide a broad review of service-learning’s history, theoretical base, and practice. It also includes a review of the literature on civic engagement in middle level education. Chapter Three explains my plan for conducting this study and how I prepare to carry it out. Chapter Four represents my action phase, my personal story of lived experiences, with help from my family and friends, who are with me along the way. In Chapter Five, I reflect on my story, my conversations with critical friends, and how they can help me answer my research questions. Finally, in Chapter Six, I demonstrate my personal interpretive framework and the overarching findings that emerge as I reveal my story. I provide a graphic profile for my research question: What is a service-learning teacher?

CHAPTER TWO: MY INVESTIGATION

“Good morning, Mrs. Verdi,” George says as he enters the room, monstrous book bag in tow.

“Good morning, George. How are you?” George is a big kid for the eighth grade. His height and bearing might attract the football team’s defensive line coach, but he hasn’t ever come across as a young man who wants to hit anything. He is smart, respectful, and kind, and a de facto leader in the second year of the service-learning class.

“I’m fine.” And then quickly, “Hey, are we going to start planning the Memorial Day display today?” George asks in his mellow-yet-excited tone. I love it when a kid gets excited about a project.

“Yes, yes! It’s a great idea.” Following our great success with the Patriot Day Memorial and his involvement with our Veterans Day Ceremony, David suggested that we organize some type of memorial for those who have died serving our country for the upcoming Memorial Day.

I hand him a copy of the R.A.Y.S. Project I.P.A.R.D. Framework (National Youth Leadership Council, 2014). “Here. Start working on this.”

The beauty of the class concept is that George, as well as the other students, know and understand the process of investigating, planning, and preparing for a service-learning project. The class offers them a window of time each day to go through these important steps that guide our school to successful projects. George knows that the investigation piece is key. He knows that it is important to review his idea from all angles. What is Memorial Day? When did it start?

Do we honor all military or just service members who died in combat? How many service members would we honor? Just as I expect my students to do, I also investigate before I plan.

My literature review is guided by my quest to interpret my experiences in my service-learning classroom. In the following sections, I provide an extensive literature review of service-learning from a historical, theoretical, and practical perspective. I also explore existing research on teachers who use service-learning in K-12 education to better identify the gap I am seeking to fill. This review also explores the important relationship between middle level education, service-learning, and civic engagement.

Service-Learning

A Brief History of Service-Learning

I first explored the history of service-learning in preparation for a doctoral class assignment. As I stated before, service-learning found me; now, I needed to find out more about its origin. I learn that Sigmon, writing for the Council of Independent Colleges in 1995, claims service-learning has existed, although unlabeled, since the end of the 19th-century in the form of governmental initiatives, such as the Morrill and Homestead Act for land grant colleges (Stanton, Cruz, & Giles, 1999). Stanton, Cruz, and Giles (1999) include Sigmon's historical timeline in *Service-Learning: A Movement's Pioneers Reflect on Its Origins, Practice and Future*. According to Sigmon, private philanthropies organized by the wealthy continued the practice as they began the search for service opportunities. It is also around that time that many black colleges and universities are established based on the principles of combining work, service, and learning (Stanton, Cruz, & Giles, 1999).

William James and John Dewey begin to develop intellectual foundations of service-based learning as early as 1905. The Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works

Projects Administration are government initiatives that combine service and learning. Later would come the Peace Corps and Vista programs.

By 1968, education associations such as the Southern Regional Education Board and the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare are participating in national conferences to link service and learning. By the early 1970s, many private colleges have created specialized service-learning programs. In 1982, the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) is formed in an effort to prepare future leaders in the service movement. In 1985, several college presidents organize Campus Compact to focus on the development of service-learning in higher education (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the growth of collegiate service-learning continues. In 1990, President George Bush creates the Office of National Service and The Points of Light Foundation to honor service providers as more and more colleges and high schools begin to integrate service and learning. Later that year, Congress passes, and President Bush signs, the National and Community Service Act. The legislation authorizes grants to schools to support service-learning and demonstration grants for national service programs to youth corps, nonprofits, and colleges and universities. Learn and Serve America is established (as Serve-America). The legislation also authorizes the establishment of the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC). In 1993, the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development endorses the importance of linking service with learning (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999).

With the passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act in 1993, the various services are united under the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). One of the agency's first responsibilities is organizing the national Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service once the King Holiday is approved by Congress. CNCS oversees Learn and Serve

America, the agency that is charged with supporting and encouraging America's young people to engage in service-learning opportunities (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). In 1999, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation introduces the Learning In Deed initiative which funds RMC Corporation's study of the impact of service-learning programs from 1990 to 1999 and supports a four-year study of existing programs (RMC Research Corporation, 2002). It is also the source of funding that ultimately provides me with the \$1000 grant for the Trash-To-Treasure Project, my first foray into service-learning. With the passage of the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, the Service America Act is reauthorized, and national service programs administered by the CNCS are to be expanded. That expansion is how I came to acquire grant funding for the class I start in 2009. However, on April 15, 2011, President Obama signs a resolution reducing CNCS funding of all services and totally eliminating funds for K-12 Learn and Serve America programs (CNCS, 2012).

Defining Service-Learning

The term service-learning is originally used by educators Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey in 1967 to describe a Tennessee Valley Authority funded project that links students and faculty of Oak Ridge Institute of Nuclear Studies with the development of the East Tennessee River (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Service-learning is first defined in a publication issued by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) in 1969 as the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine needs in combination with conscious educational growth. For almost forty years, educational researchers and practitioners struggle to establish a definition of service-learning. The literature presents the terms "service" and "learning" equally separated and joined. The best explanation for the hyphenated version comes from James C. Kielsmeier of the NYLC in the introduction of *Growing to Greatness* (Kielsmeier, Root, Pernu, & Lyngstad, 2010), a report

produced by NYLC on the status of service-learning. Kielsmeier et al. states “the hyphen in service-learning is symbolic of the equal relationship between the twin concepts that form this powerful idea: carefully tying academic objectives to meaningful service enriches both student learning and communities” (p. 1). Using either form, the definition is still multi-faceted. Billig (2000) states:

While disagreement about the definition of service learning persists, there is general consensus that its major components, as practice, include active participation, thoughtfully organized experiences, focus on community needs and school-community coordination, academic curriculum integration, structured time for reflection, opportunities for application of skills and knowledge, extended learning opportunities, and development of the sense of caring for others. (p. 659)

Sigmon (1979) emphasizes three principles for service-learning: (1) Those being served control the services provided; (2) Those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions; and (3) Those who serve are also learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). Sigmon then broadens the use of the term “service-learning” in a 1994 typology comparison he creates (see Table 2) so that the notion of balance between the learning goals and service outcomes is clear (Furco, 1996).

Table 2. *A Service and Learning Typology (Sigmon, 1994, p. 184, reproduced with permission; see Appendix B)*

service-LEARNING	Learning goals primary; service outcomes middle
SERVICE-learning	Service outcomes primary; learning goals middle
service-learning	Service and learning goals separate
SERVICE-LEARNING	Service and learning goals of equal weight; each enhances the other for all participants

The NSLC defines it as a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction, and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (Generator School Network, 2015). Skinner and Chapman (1999) define service learning as “curriculum-based community service that integrates classroom instruction with community service activities” (p. 1). The Community Service Act of 1990, which authorizes the Learn and Serve America grant program, defines service learning as:

A method under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community; is coordinated with an elementary school, middle school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community; and helps foster civic responsibility; and that is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum of the students, or the educational components of the community service program in which the participants are enrolled; and provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience. (Community Service Act, 1990, 42 U.S.C., Para. 101)

Service-learning is not volunteering, where there is no compelling need, nor community service, where there is no academic objective. The service must be organized in relation to an academic course or curriculum, must have clear learning objectives, and must address real community needs over a sustained period of time. The learning occurs through both community-based practice and regularly scheduled critical reflection on that practice (Skinner & Chapman, 1999).

Educational Theory behind Service-Learning

On theory, one must include the various works of John Dewey. Dewey's theory and commitment to democratic education and participatory democracy seem to be at the center of his philosophical beliefs. According to Harkavy and Benson (1998), academic service-learning is a pedagogy that is derived from a theory of democratic education and schooling that Dewey presents in *The School and Society* (1900) to replace Plato's aristocratic theory of education and society. Though Dewey never directly writes about service-learning, Harkavy and Benson (1998) go to great depths to outline his extensive contributions to the field through the development of the theory of instrumental intelligence and democratic instrumental education. Robertson (1992) has also presents the connections between Deweyan theory and service-learning.

According to Giles and Eyler (1994), research aimed at developing theory both as a body of knowledge and as a guide for pedagogical practice would be productive work. Although those researchers say service-learning suffers from a "lack of a well-articulated conceptual framework," (p.77) they believe *How We Think* (Dewey, 1933) and *Experience and Education* (Dewey, 1938) are contributions for a potential theory of service-learning on how learning takes place, what the learning is, and the relation of learning to action (Giles and Eyler, 1994).

Service-learning has been linked to the psychosocial development theories, cognitive development theories, and to various learning theories (Bradley, 2003). Furco (2013) encourages service-learning researcher to connect with and learn from "kindred fields" (p.18). Furco (2013) specifically proposes connections with project-based learning, problem-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and other pedagogies that contain some or most of the elements

of service-learning, since these fields have managed to build stronger research bases and have evidenced an impact in students' academic achievement. In Furco's (2013) words:

The service-learning field can benefit from exploring the research within these kindred pedagogies and to perhaps replicate some of the studies in those fields using service-learning as the instructional practice. In addition, studies that compare academic outcomes between service-learning and kindred pedagogies should be explored. If it is found that there is no difference in outcomes between inquiry-based learning and service-learning, then it can be argued that service-learning is equally as effective as a practice that already has a relatively strong evidence base. (p. 18)

According to Billig (2000), many researchers also trace the roots of service-learning to the writings of Jean Piaget, and some even go back as far as Alexis de Tocqueville. Those philosophers believed learning occurs best when students are actively involved in their own learning and when the learning has a distinct purpose. Additionally, Greene (1996) writes about the emphasis on reciprocal learning between the server and the receiver.

There is also a great deal of work connecting service-learning and civic development, engagement, and participation. According to Giles and Eyler (1994), one reason Dewey wants to democratize the schools is to have students experience the mutuality of social life through service:

Where the school work consists in simply learning lessons, mutual assistance, instead of being the most natural form of cooperation and association, becomes a clandestine effort to relieve one's neighbor of his proper duties. Where active work is going on, all this is changed. Helping others, instead of being a form of charity which impoverishes the

recipient, is simply an aid in setting free the powers and furthering the impulse of the one helped. (Dewey, 1900, p. 29)

According to Hepburn (1997), Arthur W. Dunn, in what may have been the first civics book for educators, wrote: "The best of your life comes from participation in the life of your community ... giving to and receiving from the community's life" (Dunn, 1907, p. 9; as cited by Hepburn, p. 1). The 1916 Bureau of Education's social studies curriculum committee, chaired by Dunn, places great emphasis on connecting the citizen education of youth to actual community experiences, which undoubtedly reflects widespread interest in John Dewey's ideas on the necessity of linking school learning experiences to experiences in the multiple communities of society (Hepburn, 1997).

The Practice of Service-Learning

The organization of a service-learning instructional strategy has evolved greatly since 1990. There is a consensus among practitioners that, in order to implement quality service-learning, certain standards of practice must be upheld. In 2008, the NYLC published standards for quality practice. Those standards, as represented in Table 3, are now regarded by many service-learning organizations and educational programs as a model for quality service-learning practice. In addition to those quality standards, there are steps or stages of practice that have evolved within the service-learning field.

Table 3. *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice*. (NYLC, 2014, “What is Service-learning?” section, reproduced with permission; see Appendix C.) Copyright © 2008 National Youth Learning Council.

Meaningful Service	Link to Curriculum	Reflection	Diversity
Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.	Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.	Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one’s relationship to society.	Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.
Youth Voice	Partnerships	Progress Monitoring	Duration and Intensity
Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.	Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.	Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.	Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

To better meet the standards, there are steps or stages of practice that have evolved within the service-learning field. NYLC (2014) promotes a student-centered inquiry model known as IPARD—an acronym for Investigation, Planning and Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration—this process is represented by a framework to aid in identifying specific learning goals and developing a project that meets them (see Figure 5).

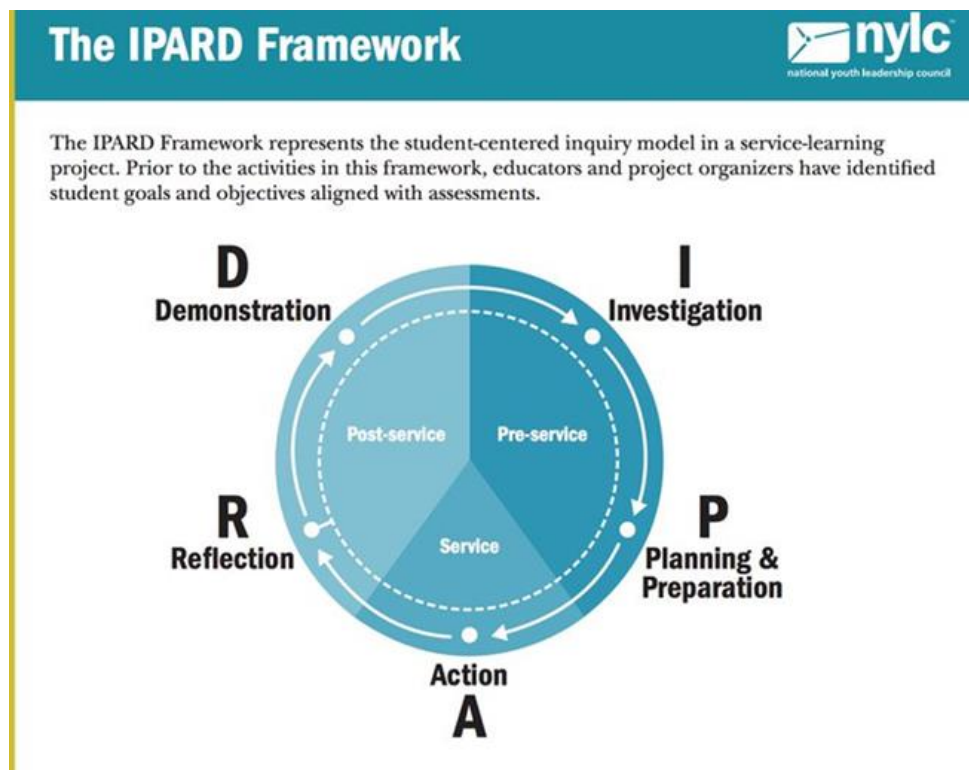


Figure 5. NYLC IPARD Framework (2014), reproduced with permission, see Appendix C; copyright © 2008 National Youth Learning Council.

IPARD—an acronym for Investigation, Planning and Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration—breaks the process down into a step-by-step framework to aid in identifying specific learning goals and developing a project that meets them. Other versions of the educational best practice framework exist, such as IPARD/C (investigate, plan/prepare, action/implement, reflect, demonstrate/celebrate) for students to use to investigate and take action upon social issues in the community. Based on Kaye (2010), I have summarized each of the stages of IPARD/C:

Investigation. Students will take inventory of the interest, skills, and talents of their peers and partners. Students will conduct needs analysis and investigate the problem. In this stage, students will identify possible partners and begin to outline ways to address the need.

Preparation. It involves acquiring new information, planning a responsible course of action, identifying and integrating appropriate academic objectives, and establishing measurable goals. In the preparation phase of service-learning, teachers and students work together to prepare for learning combined with social action.

Action. Students may engage in direct service, indirect service, advocacy, or research that improves the understanding of a need or problem. The action phase will offer students a safe environment to learn but allow students to encounter real consequences. Because of questions raised and answered, students begin to think more deeply about the issues and their social contexts and begin to experience first-hand the results of their learning in action. They apply their knowledge, energy, skills, and enthusiasm in showing concern for others and begin to appreciate the contributions of their classmates.

Reflection. It is the systematic practice of revisiting previous stages of the process to examine and describe what has happened. Reflection can take various formats, including role play, journaling, and discussion. Reflection provides an opportunity for the integration of learning, experiences, and awareness of personal growth. Students begin to see the impact of combining what they learned and its effect on their future thinking and action. It is also important that adults model the reflective process for students.

Demonstration/Celebration. It allows students to showcase what they have learned, how they have learned it, and what it all means to an outside group. Demonstration can be in the form of articles to the local paper, the creation of a pamphlet or other materials that can be disseminated, a presentation, or a display. Kaye (2010) advocates demonstration instead of celebration because demonstration allows students to confirm what they have learned and continue to learn more.

Service-Learning Teachers

Lofgran (2004) names the lack of a support system as the major hindrance in the use of service-learning as an instructional strategy. In her concluding statements, Lofgran expresses her hopes that the study will lead to ways to overcome the hindrances she is able to identify. One of her suggestions is to investigate how teachers manage to make service-learning work while preparing their students to pass norm- and criterion-referenced tests. The study concludes teachers need to be taught how to efficiently tie their core curriculum to the goals of service-learning to ensure confidence that students will do well on mandatory tests. Lofgran also suggests as a next step an investigation of a group of teachers who have, at one time, implemented service-learning, but for various reasons have discontinued its use. “Understanding why teachers discontinue service-learning would provide information to pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as to those involved in training. Such information may help prevent the discontinuance of service-learning before it occurs” (p.187).

Based on Billig’s (2002) framework, Krebs conducts a phenomenological study in 2006 that results in “Sustainability of Service-Learning: What do K-12 Teachers Say?” That body of work is included in the volume entitled *Scholarship for Sustaining Service-Learning and Civic Engagement* (Bowden, Billig, & Holland, 2008). Krebs’s (2006) study of the motivations for new and veteran middle grades teachers to conduct a service-learning project concludes that teachers are motivated for both personal and professional reasons. All the components of the Billig (2002) framework are important pieces to the sustainability puzzle, from cultural norms to national policies. “From a teacher’s perspective, strong leadership seems to be the glue to hold that service-learning sustainability puzzle together” (Krebs, 2006, p. 108). Krebs concluding

statements also point out that further research needs to be done to examine the role of teacher leadership as a key to sustainability.

Other areas for review include finding the most current statistics about the use of service-learning in traditional academic classrooms. The most current national study of the status of service-learning is the *Growing to Greatness* (G2G) report produced by the NYLC in 2010.

University of Minnesota contributor Karen Seashore makes a statement regarding sustainability:

While we realize the value inherent in service-learning programs, we also know through a variety of studies that quality programs that fuse experience and academics are often temporary features of the institutional landscape and that service-learning is typically pushed to the side when new priorities become apparent. (Kielsmeier et al., p. 6)

The G2G study finds few teachers use service-learning because of a lack of interest and inadequate knowledge of standards of best service-learning practice. The report also shows implementation is weak, few teachers are involved, and parents, students, and faculty do not widely share an understanding of the value of service-learning (Kielsmeier et al., p. 10). Spring, Dietz, and Grimm (2006) found interest in community service remains strong in schools; yet, there is a decline in the number of schools that integrate experience into the academic curriculum. The report indicates the limited personal observation completed by G2G is corroborated by a study commissioned by the Corporation for National and Community Service (Spring, Grimm, & Dietz, 2008).

Cochran Holmes (2013) posits a gap in the research in which service-learning teachers are the focal point and research studies regarding the personal experiences of service-learning teachers are virtually nonexistent. Cochran Holmes also states a qualitative approach is required to illuminate the phenomenon of the service-learning teacher. In the same phenomenological

study, Cochran Holmes poses the questions, “What is the essence of the service-learning teacher? Why do teachers continue to implement service-learning even when they are crunched for time, pressured by testing, and inundated with paperwork?” (p.8).

The phenomenological study reveals five themes that have interesting implications: communication development, community pedagogy, fostering relationships, student growth and responsibility, and teacher support. According to Cochran Holmes (2013), those findings have implications for two key groups, educational leaders or school administrators and service-learning teachers or classrooms or the community. The implications for educational leaders and school administrators include the potential of service-learning to accelerate reform efforts and meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. Cochran Holmes also holds educational leaders of today have the obligation to promote social justice in order to celebrate and embrace diversity in schools.

The implications for the service-learning teacher, the service-learning classroom, and the community include the need for an increase in an awareness of socioeconomic class differences. Through service-learning, teachers can educate today’s youth culture and enlighten them about class differences. “There is an obvious need for a unique curriculum that will open students’ eyes to the world around them and teach them to be change agents who promote social justice; service-learning has the potential to satisfy this need” (Cochran Holmes, 2013, p. 180). Academic communities also need to address awareness of cultural diversity. Based on Cochran Holmes, cultural diversity in the classroom enriches discussion and increases the quality of the educational process.

As with any contemporary education reform, the Common Core State Standards challenge some teachers because they are required to discover effective means of implementation

for the new standards. “As fate would have it, service-learning’s project-based design provides an ideal framework for integrating the Common Core in that service-learning encourages collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, and other deeper learning skills” (Guilfoile, 2013, para. 3). A major implication of this study, according to Cochran Holmes (2013), is the call for service-learning teachers and communities to address the Common Core State Standards through high-quality service-learning activities for students to flourish in college and in the workforce.

Middle Level Education

Based on the premise that teaching young adolescents presents different challenges than those found with younger and older students, educational leaders develop a middle level of education as a transitional space for that age group. Over a twenty-year period, between 1967, middle schoolers would go from *Growing Up Forgotten* (Lipsitz, 1980) to “studied, researched, and analyzed with a greater degree of exuberance and sophistication than ever before” (Hough, 1991, p.2).

The concept of the middle school is unique, emphasizing the whole student and educational practices that are integrated across disciplines (Yoon, Malu, Schaefer, Reyes, & Brinegar, 2015). Jackson (2009) holds middle school practitioners and researchers seek to develop students who are critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and collaborators. Philosophically, service-learning and middle level education share a common goal in developing well-rounded citizens. Consequently, our youths need to be civically engaged. Civic engagement is any ethical way of addressing a public or common problem, a key practice for young adolescents (Levine, 2006). *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (Carnegie Council, 1989) suggests that youth service in the community should become a part of the core

program in middle school education. The report notes that youth service is an important link between schools and the community and is a means for the community to "educate all of its young adolescents to become competent, responsible, and productive adults" (p. 70). Middle school is about becoming a member, a citizen of the community.

Service-Learning and Middle Level Education

Alexander (1963) calls for varied opportunities for students to be able to identify and gain knowledge related to their own interests and also for character development, stating that the middle school needs to provide leadership in "fixing values which will survive the perils ahead" (para. 24)

(...) As boys and girls are challenged in the middle grades to assume responsibility for their own actions, to respect each other and the adults with whom they associate, and to distinguish right from wrong, truth from falsehood, they can grow to a real independence. (para. 24)

Herein lies an early and strong connection between the needs of young adolescents in their middle years of education and the social, emotional, and civic benefits of using service learning in middle school settings. In the original *Turning Points* report, the MGSSPI clearly identifies the expectation that middle schools provide service opportunities. The task force wrote:

Early adolescence offers a superb opportunity to learn values, skills, and a sense of responsibility important for citizenship in the United States. Every middle grades school should include youth service—supervised activity helping others in the community or in school—in its core instructional program. While many elements of the Turning Points design have a connection to service-learning, the principles concerning re-engagement of

families in the education of young adolescents, and creating connections between schools and their communities, are clear. (NMSA, 1989, p. 45)

Additionally, Theriot (2009) posits that tenets of *This We Believe* addressed through service-learning include: (1) school-initiated family and community partnerships; (2) students and teachers engaged in active learning; and (3) curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory.

Morgan and Streb (2001) state that when students have real responsibilities, challenging tasks, help to plan projects, and make important decisions, involvement in service-learning projects has significant and substantive impacts on students' increases in self-concept, political engagement, and attitudes toward out-groups. Service-learning in the middle grades includes: (1) preparation as students, teachers, and community collaborate; (2) service activities that respond to real, meaningful, community needs; (3) reflection that occurs continuously and connects service activities and learning outcomes; and (4) celebration and assessment of students' academic, personal, and civic growth (Fertman et al., 2002).

Service during youth is also related to greater respect of others, leadership skills, and an understanding of citizenship that can carry forward to adulthood (Morrissey & Werner-Wilson, 2005). Morgan and Streb (2001) hold that if young people do not become involved in their community in their youth, they are more likely to remain detached when they are adults. Many young people do not feel they can make a difference, solve problems in their communities, or have a meaningful impact on politics or government (Lake, Snell, Perry, et al. & The Tarrance Group, Inc., 2002). One aspect of a positive school culture involves providing opportunities for connecting with the community and developing a sense of value to that community.

Civic Engagement in Middle School

When middle students are serving in their own community, they are experiencing civic engagement. They feel a connection to the community. In order to further understand their role in and value to the community, the civic engagement must also occur in the classroom. If integrated curriculum is part of a democratic classroom, one in which students have a voice in teaching and learning, then students will understand democracy because they participate in it (Andrews, Caskey, & Anfara, 2007). The relationships developed within student-centered curriculum also foster a sense of connectedness to school that leads students to identify with the school community and commit to its values and goals (Battistich, Solomon & Watson, 1997). The NCSS recommends that social studies programs include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices in a democratic republic so that the learner can (1) practice forms of civic discussion and participation consistent with the idea of citizenship in a democratic republic and (2) examine standards designed to strengthen the common good through a range of options for citizen action (NCSS, 1994). Many states, including Florida, have added civics at the middle level to assure that these ideals, principles, and practices are being taught. Service-learning projects through civics help students connect the classroom learning to the real world.

According to Levine (2006), young people need to be civically engaged because our governing institutions work better when participation is widespread; social outcomes are more likely to be just when participation is equitable; and broad civic engagement is necessary to support a healthy, democratic culture. With substantial connections between what they are learning and service to their local, state, national, and global community contexts, students can actually experience being contributing citizens while they are young adolescents (Andrews,

2008). Additionally, some crucial public problems can only be addressed by direct action by the people. Young adolescents bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to old problems.

Billig (2011) says civic engagement is connected to the future of democracy and preparing young people for rights and responsibilities associated with U.S. democracy. Because strong democracies need competent and responsible citizens, there is a need to increase students' participation in communities and help them acquire virtues such as concern for the rights and welfare of others, efficacy, tolerance, respect, and social responsibility. Civic responsibility is strengthened by participation in service-learning in middle school, high school, and college (Morgan & Streb, 2001; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2005; Shumer, 1994).

Adolescent Development, Service-Learning, and Civic Engagement

Service-learning fits well with the developmental needs of young adolescents, and it might be a potential means of maintaining or enhancing students' engagement and confidence (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000). Stanley Hall's work in child psychology and his identification of adolescence as a time of "storm and stress" advanced the idea that education should be reoriented around children's growth-stages (Hall, 1904, p. xi; Senn, 1975). From the early 1960's through the early 1980's, districts across the nation reorganized and the middle school is born. The middle school movement developed rapidly during the last decades of the twentieth century. The National Middle School Association (NMSA), in its report *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools* (1982, 1995), outlined the characteristics of effective middle level schools (Manning, 2000). Andrews, Caskey, and Anfara (2007) summarized research supporting those characteristics for NMSA and outlined it based on what they identified as the four key frameworks of middle school education: NMSA's *This We Believe* (2003); *Turning Points 2000*; the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform's

vision statement (1998), and the National Association of Secondary School Principals' (NASSP) report *Breaking Ranks in the Middle: Strategies for Leading Middle Level Reform* (Rourke, 2006). Based on this research, a school for young adolescents must be developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable.

Dowson et al. (2005) states that effective middle schools associated with curricula responsive to the developmental needs of early adolescents promote relevance, responsibility, belonging, awareness, engagement, competence, ethics, and active learning pedagogy. Their work provides a foundation for solidifying the link between service-learning in connection with key elements of effective middle school.

Relevance. According to Dinham and Rowe (2007), effective middle schools promote middle-school curricula from which students can derive relevant or personal meaning; thus, engaging students with the “real world” (p. 15). Learning should be authentic as students seek to address significant community concerns. Service-learning projects begin with real-world problems and issues that are relevant to young adolescents. According to Schukar (1997), the middle school philosophy also holds that the organization of the curriculum should go beyond separate subject areas and that themes should emerge from the concerns of middle school students themselves, thereby empowering them. The needs of the adolescent learner and the qualities inherent in teachers who choose and are prepared to teach at the middle level make the middle school an optimal environment for service-learning.

Moreover, Schukar (1997) finds service-learning “enhanced curriculum and instruction in middle schools and helped bridge the gap between the theory and practice of middle level education” (p.182). Dinham and Rowe (2007) state that a frequently cited and advocated feature of middle schooling is that of student involvement in classroom curriculum planning. Service-

learning provides for student voice, as students learn to ask questions and formulate answers to the questions. Morgan & Streb (2001) find that, when students have a voice in the project, service-learning provides a solution to some of the problems of civic disengagement. Hunter and Park (2005) have noted, “Research suggests that students’ learning is more effective and rewarding if they have a ‘voice’ in and ownership of aspects of the curriculum and the teaching/learning process” (p. 164).

Responsibility. Students should have appropriate self-control over learning, accountability, and responsibility (Dowson et al., 2005). Schukar (1997) states that one of the principal goals of middle level education is to create learning opportunities that are student centered and provide for student responsibility for learning. Service-learning moves the “learner as doer” (p. 177) to the center of the educational stage presenting even greater challenge. Students are encouraged to assume responsibility for their own learning. Middle school students gain a sense of responsibility and self-identity as they collaborate with diverse team members and positive adult role models in service activities (Leming, 2001; Scales et al., 2000).

Belonging. According to Deci and Ryan (1985), basic human psychological needs include the need for relatedness, competence, autonomy, and the fulfillment of such needs helps students attain self-regulation, motivation, and personal well-being. Middle-school-aged students are at a critical stage of development. Erickson (1968) stated the middle years are a time for identity construction and developing a sense of belonging. Ellerbrock, Kiefer, and Alley (2014) found that a student’s sense of belonging is fostered through the caring connections that teachers create and that a sense of belonging is also enhanced when they are accepted and valued by peers. In service-learning, those caring connections and positive peer-to-peer relationships are inherently nurtured. Studies have indicated that service-learning might provide greater

autonomy than students, especially marginal students, typically enjoy (for example, Conrad & Hedin, 1981), and might prove especially helpful in validating students' sense of both their general value and their academic competence (Dewsbury-White, 1993).

Service-learning activities address young adolescents' need for connection and feeling valued, their self-esteem and self-efficacy (Billig, Meyer, & Hofschire, 2003; Scales et al., 2000; Theriot, 2009). The effort to connect or reconnect young adolescents with community is a key element of middle level education because it makes them feel a sense of belonging. Toepfer (1997) holds that, by becoming involved in local community issues and needs, young adolescents can develop a personal sense of altruism and proactive social values and behaviors. Their capacity to help with actual concerns, issues, needs, and problems in their community enhances their personal sense of belonging. Service-learning would foster a sense of acceptance and affirmation within a supportive and safe learning environment, which Dowson et al. (2005) consider is a key attribute in effective middle schools.

Awareness. Researchers in the social-emotional learning field have embraced service-learning as a key strategy for accomplishing the five core social-emotional competencies (self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision making) all young people should develop (Elias, 2003). Social emotional learning theorists believe that “social emotional learning provides the skills while service-learning provides the opportunities to apply the skills” (p. 11). Both self and social awareness, through appropriate curricula and learning, are key elements of middle level education (Dowson et al., 2005). The National Council for the Social Studies calls for social studies programs to include experiences that enable the learner to describe personal connections to places associated with community, nation, and world as a part of the theme of individual development and identity (NCSS, 1994).

Within the theme of individuals, groups, and institutions, NCSS suggests social studies programs include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions so that learners can apply knowledge of how groups and institutions work to meet individual needs and provide for the common good (NCSS, 1994).

Engagement. Participation in quality service-learning experiences positively impacts students' engagement and academic learning (Akujobi & Simmons, 1997; Billig, 2004; Billig & Klute, 2003; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Klute & Billig, 2002; Melchior, 1999). Dowson et al. (2005) define engagement as meeting students' developmental needs through tasks which are motivating, challenging, and invite affiliation—essential to adolescents since they want affiliation and seek to contribute to a tradition. Those traditions can be of a positive nature, or a negative nature, as long as it makes the youths feel that they belong. The middle school mantra includes the idea that the best way to prevent problem behaviors and associations is to focus on adolescent strengths, not deficits, and to promote positive changes across the second decade of life (Lerner, 2005). Youniss and Yates (1996) find that service helps form a social or civic identity and, as they continue in service, it is clarified and strengthened in ways that last a lifetime because they have altered their identities. Young people who serve are less likely to use drugs or engage in risky behaviors and are more likely to have positive academic, psychological, and occupational well-being (Fiske, 2002; Levine, 2006; Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004). Youths who serve are more likely to have strong work ethics when they reach adulthood and are more likely to volunteer and vote (Zaff & Michelsen, 2001).

Competence. Service-learning embodies the alternative approach of "positive youth development" (Levine, 2009, p. 24), which recognizes young people have special assets to contribute to their communities—to repeat: creativity, energy, idealism, and a fresh outlook

(Levine, 2006). Service-learning extends the classroom to the community, where young adolescents apply their knowledge in a safe, collaborative, developmentally responsive environment (Kim & Billig, 2003; Klute, Sandel, & Billig, 2002; Scales & Blyth, 1997). Effective middle schools help students develop personal expertise and competencies, knowledge, and skills (Dowson et al., 2005). As middle grades students learn more about the world and its challenges, they need to learn firsthand that with knowledge comes the power to effect change for the better (Jackson, 2009). Service learning provides the opportunity to connect local action to global issues.

Ethics. Service-learning clearly helps students to develop caring, altruism, and other social emotional learning associated with “heart” (Billig, 2000, p.14). Based on Furco (2002), service-learning is grounded in models for the development of ethical and moral reasoning in studies that were established by Kohlberg (1984). Delve, Mintz, and Stewart (1990) outlined the relationship of Kohlberg's (1984) work to the core structure of service-learning highlighting the relationship between community service and moral development. Dowson, Ross, Donovan, Richards, and Johnson (2005) hold that effective middle schools facilitate ethical awareness and help students develop their personalities. Early adolescence is a time for the development of attitudes, beliefs, and values that remain with them for life (Brighton, 2007). Therefore, it is the time when they transition from a self-centered perspective to considering the rights and feelings of others (Scales, 2010). In this, they begin to understand equity.

Active learning pedagogy. As constructivism has become the dominant view of how students learn, it may seem obvious to equate active learning with active methods of instruction (Dinham & Rowe, 2007). Service-learning involves active learning of content knowledge and skills while helping others (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Furco, 2002). By engaging in service, youths

come to see how they fit into the world in a constructive, rewarding way (Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003). Furthermore, service-learning supports civic responsibility, personal development, and academic achievement through such activities as volunteering, tutoring, and clean-up projects (Jackson, 2009). A richer knowledge base is developed through authentic and active learning experiences such as those made available by service-learning.

Middle School Teachers

Middle level teachers come to the classroom with varying types of educational preparation. While many have received preparation for K-6 education, others have a focused content training for teaching secondary level students, generally meaning high school. There is a consensus at the middle level that teachers of young adolescents need specialized professional preparation to be highly successful (Association of Middle Level Education, 2015). A comprehensive understanding of the developmental stage of early adolescence, which middle level preparation programs support, provides a basis on which middle level teachers can create curriculum, utilize effective teaching strategies, and use assessment wisely and effectively (AMLE, 2015). When teachers do not have a concrete foundation in young adolescent development, classroom effectiveness may be limited. Dinham and Rowe (2007) hold that the effects of quality of teaching far outweigh factors associated with students' family socio-economic and social-cultural backgrounds, stating "many writers have questioned whether the philosophy and principles of middle schooling are any different from those of good teaching and effective schooling generally" (p.14).

The relationship middle level teachers form with their students is key to the young adolescents' success. Middle school teachers must create a caring environment that values the nature of young adolescents and provides challenging and empowering learning opportunities.

“Teacher and peer support are academic and social in nature, may foster a responsive learning environment, and have unique implications for supporting adolescents’ academic motivation, classroom engagement, and school belonging” (Kiefer, Alley, & Ellerbrock, 2015, p.14).

Cognitive abilities are enhanced in early adolescence, as individuals become faster and more efficient at processing information—at least in settings in which they feel comfortable in performing cognitive tasks (Kuhn, 2006). Therein lies the challenge of teaching middle school. The middle level teacher faces the challenge of balancing conditions for academic learning with issues of motivation and social-emotional well-being. Wentzel (1991) found student interest in academic activities might be driven by teacher characteristics that reflect social as well as curricular and instructional approaches to learning. Feeling a positive connection to teachers and schools can influence children’s social, emotional, and academic adjustment (Murray & Greenberg, 2000). Having a supportive relationship with the teacher may influence the students’ level of comfort and their confidence to approach and explore new situations within the school setting. Relationships with teachers and bonds with school can also inhibit inappropriate social behaviors if such behaviors jeopardize continued support and membership within the school context (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992).

Moreover, Hargreaves (2000) argued that the centrality of teachers' emotional relationships with students forms a filter for their work. Teachers choose instructional strategies based in part upon the effects of those strategies on students' and teachers' emotions. Developing healthy student-teacher relationships is a major goal of middle level education. By working together in service learning projects, close relationships between teachers and students are enhanced (Schukar, 1997, p.177). Seitsinger and Felner (2000) found that middle school teachers who used service-learning more regularly are those who are more knowledgeable about

their state content standards, more experienced, and have better understandings of adolescent development.

With that aim, the organization now named the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) is committed to promoting the essential attributes that incorporate the characteristics the organization has outlined as the keys to educating young adolescents (AMLE/NMSA, 2010). Those attributes address curriculum, instruction, and assessment, leadership and organization, and school culture and community. They frame multiple characteristics that the organization seeks to foster in middle schools.

Conclusion

This chapter has allowed me to present my investigation process as I prepared for my self-exploration. I better understand service-learning and the needs of the young adolescent. My review of the literature uncovered much to support my belief that service-learning, as practice and pedagogy, fits perfectly into the middle level of education as a way to activate civic engagement in our young adolescents. The common thread, for my professional self and subjective educational theory, is knowing and understanding the needs of young adolescents as they developed socially responsible attitudes and behaviors. As Scale et al. (2000) states:

Being enabled by adults to provide help to others, watching adults do the same, and communicating about the meaning of those experiences as common features of service-learning programs might facilitate the acquisition by young people of socially responsible attitudes and behaviors. (p. 333)

Middle school provides the optimum environment for service-learning.

CHAPTER THREE: PLANNING & PREPARATION

“If your determination is fixed, I do not counsel you to despair. Few things are impossible to diligence and skill. Great works are performed not by strength, but perseverance.”

Samuel Johnson

It's the first day of school. On the surface, my classroom looks ready. The bulletin boards are colorfully decorated, one with samples of exemplary student work and the other with a collection of world maps and geography terms. Still another holds an assemblage of items necessary for any classroom: a current bell schedule, my classroom rules, makeup work instructions, and emergency-related instructions, such as the “duck-and-cover” tornado and “stay-inside-if-it-is-lightening” posters. The trapezoid or trap tables are all aligned to form three rows of neat semi-circles, and there is a notecard at each space to identify student seats. All of the trays, bins, and baskets are labeled and ready. The room looks and feels warm and inviting, and I am not nervous about the first day. It is tomorrow that has me stressed. Just before all of the students start filing in, Bonnie sticks her head in the door. “Hey, Mrs. Verdi.” I turn toward her and she comes to give me a hug.

I lean back and look at her. “Hey, honey, you look so cute today.” Her blonde hair has gotten long, and she has it styled like a teenage girl, a big change from the pig tails from a few years ago. Her beautiful eyes now boast a slight hint of make-up. She has grown up so much in the past two years. “I hope you have a good first day, and I’ll see you during third.” She turns to head to her mother’s classroom just down the hall.

My homeroom students begin to shuffle in. I recognize many from Open House the previous week and greet each student as they come in. I cannot remember all of their names, but I know it won't take long. Homeroom on the first day is usually quiet, so I begin to think...

I know my schedule is going to be nuts but I will make it work. I have two periods of seventh grade Geography and then the R.A.Y.S. Service-Learning class after that. Fourth is my planning period, fifth is the Think, Learn, and Serve (TLS) sixth grade exploratory wheel class, and the last period is another seventh grade Geography. I am so excited that I get to have the wheel class again. It *really* gets the sixth graders involved and on board with recycling. And I know that the group of kids I have for the service-learning elective class are going to be awesome. I have the geography curriculum down, and, if I would just use the lessons I have already created, most of the planning is already done. But, I'm starting my first Ph.D. course that fall. I will have to make time to keep up with reading and assignments. I can do this.

When third period rolls around, the class atmosphere changes quite a bit. As familiar faces stroll in, there is a great deal more noise than is usual on a first day because it is not their first day together. Most of the R.A.Y.S. students met in the week prior to pre-planning and we have done several activities to get to know each other and quite a bit of self-assessment to better understand individual learning styles, personality traits, and discover leadership potential. I already pre-partnered the eighth graders with the new seventh graders so everyone has a buddy.

After going over schoolwide first day procedures, I ask for someone to hand out our course syllabus. Allison pops up from her seat and says loudly, "I'll do it." She is quick and efficient about it.

We spend the next twenty or so minutes reviewing the syllabus together in class. I remind the R.A.Y.S. students, "This is an academic elective and you have academic

responsibilities. Your first assignment is to create a week's worth of Daily Do Now's". I show them the form they will use and, then, I put an example under the Elmo so they can see this week's writing prompts, logic puzzles, and quotes. I then go over the requirements for the academic portfolio and how we would build it up each quarter with various quick writes, technology tasks, and reflection assignments.

"But don't we need to get started on Patriot Day?" George asks.

"Yes, we do." I say, "But I want to make sure you guys know my expectations." I feel the need to emphasize, "I know you guys get really excited about planning and doing Patriot Day, but I remember how quickly we forgot about responsibilities beyond that one project last year. I want you to know ahead of time about how the class will function all year and about your assignments."

"We won't", they say in unison, each with a broad grin and bright eyes.

"Now can we talk about Patriot Day?" Allison announces. "I want to be on the morning show!"

"Me, too!" Veronica chimes in.

"Are you gonna get us out of class?" Mitchell interjects.

My hand goes up, but it takes a minute before everyone gets refocused. "Before we do anything, we need to form committees. Every one of you will get to be a part of Patriot Day, but a small committee of you needs to meet and plan what we are going to do. Others of you can plan for other projects, and then everyone can work on them as well. Okay?" I get a few nods.

"It's almost time to go." Charlotte points out. We all look at the TV clock. Our first day together has come and gone.

“Well, I guess we will start by organizing committees tomorrow. I have the list of community needs you guys developed during our summer meeting, so we will let those guide us tomorrow.”

The time rolls over to mark the end of third, and they all stand to leave. I get a chain of “byes” and hugs. “Bye, Mrs. Verdi, see you tomorrow.”

The day isn’t over. I still have the sixth grade wheel and one more period of Geography. But my mind is already on committees and Patriot Day. It is only two weeks away! Maybe we should put off committees and just all focus on Patriot Day. I’ll have to think about that. Whew. It’s fourth period. I’d better grab a bite to eat and get set up for the sixth graders.

Over the next six months, I worked myself to exhaustion and end up sitting across the desk from Kay, my former principal, having that fateful conversation about taking a year off and being a “regular” teacher. When I first started teaching at my school, Kay is one of three assistant principals, but she is always the one I seek out when in need of support. I am very excited and proud when she becomes our principal, and I miss her greatly since she moved to another middle school. I have a great deal of trust in her words and respect for how she deals with teachers, students, and parents. It is only natural for me to let go of myself in her office.

My Study

I choose to write an autoethnography, an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, 2004; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Holman Jones, 2005). I find the nature of autoethnography provides the welcoming intellectual space for describing the cultural phenomena of the service-learning teacher to others through the practical lens of my own everyday experience (Berry & Warren, 2009). I explore my experiences as a service-learning

teacher through autoethnography, primarily personal narrative, using the following guiding questions:

1. What does it mean to be a service-learning teacher?
2. What personal and professional experiences shape a middle school service-learning teacher?
3. What do students learn in a middle school service-learning classroom?

In this chapter, you will learn about the actions I took to get to my narrative truth. I describe how I went about the process of capturing my lived experiences.

Why Autoethnography?

I explore several qualitative methods but find that, due to the uniqueness of my story, autoethnography is the best fit. Using autoethnography allows me to "hold self and culture together" (Jones, 2005, p. 764), to "use self to get to culture" (Pelias, 2003, p. 372), and to understand "personal connections to culture" (Wall, 2006, p. 11). In other words, my description and reflection on my experience is for the purpose of exposing the ethos of the service-learning teacher. The initial emphasis is on self, including personal experiences in childhood, my youth, young adulthood, professional experiences outside of education, as well as my experiences as a service-learning teacher. By the end of Chapter Four, I immerse the readers into the culture of a service-learning classroom. By using autoethnography, I do something important for me and for others (Ellis, 2000). My findings represent my inspired construction of my lived reality (Dyson, 2007).

Autoethnography has its beginnings in anthropological research. Based on Hayano (1979), the term is first used in reference to a 1938 study of a native people by one of their own. Hayano poses the question, "Do the data collected and analyzed by an indigenous insider of a particular group differ significantly from those of an outsider?" (p. 100). Hayano's work goes on

to attempt to sort out the most important features and consequences of studying one's own people. Autoethnographic studies are an established design in many disciplines. According to Given (2008), the turn to autoethnography in qualitative research is connected to the shift from viewing our observations of others as non-problematic to a concern about power, praxis, and the writing process. Autoethnography allows me, the insider, to have the power to process and write about my own lived experience and avoid misrepresentation.

Ellis and Bochner (2006) bring autoethnography into being as a method of knowing that does not seek to generalize or be the "right" answer. This is important to me as I have no illusions that my findings represent *the* truth, but they do represent *my* truth. Ellis and Bochner (2006) view the use of autoethnography as the vehicle to drive ethnography "away from the gaze of the distanced and detached observer and toward the embrace of intimate involvement, engagement, and embodied participation" (p. 433). Ellis (2004) describes autoethnography as research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. Autoethnographies are stories about authors who view themselves as part of the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives (e.g., Berry, 2006; Goodall, 2006; Poulos, 2008; Tillman, 2009; Tillotson, 2013).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), autoethnography connects the personal through multiple layers of consciousness. Stinson (2009) suggests the first layer should be the social and cultural aspects of my personal experiences being viewed through an ethnographic wide-angle lens. I do that by talking to my "critical friends" through informal conversations and interviews. Stinson asserts that then I might reveal, through interpretations of the social and cultural, characteristics of myself that might be less than flattering and might create a sense of

vulnerability. “This constitutive process of autoethnographic stories opens up possibilities for broadening a sense of connection, while deepening appreciation for the ultimate uniqueness and complexity of any life as lived and narrated” (Berry & Patti, 2015, p.267).

According to Ellis (2004), one approach to autoethnography is the personal narrative through which the researcher:

proposes to understand herself or some aspect of her life as it intersects with an edifying context, connect to others, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives. (p. 46)

The researcher becomes the phenomenon being studied and the reader becomes a co-participant in discourse, not just a passive receiver of knowledge (Ellis, 2000). By choosing autoethnography, I ask readers to feel the truth of my story and to become “co-participants, engaging in the storyline morally, emotionally, aesthetically and intellectually” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745). In my autoethnography, I have embedded a story within a story, thereby providing a meta-narrative about myself as a teacher, a service-learning teacher, a wife, a mother, a daughter, a colleague, and a friend, in a service-learning context.

Adams, Holman-Jones, and Ellis (2015) discuss a common set of priorities, concerns, and ways of doing autoethnography, which I use in my study. I lay out my life, both personal and professional, in order to foreground the research and writing process. My experiences, my story, hold the answers to my questions, which constitute the purpose for this study. I explicate my sense-making process by offering complex, insider accounts. I am reflexive and turn back on my experiences, my identities, and my relationships to consider how they influence my research. The reflexive process of researching and writing my autoethnographic story allows me to perform and understand myself as a cultural being and those who have lived or are currently

living experiences like mine, in ways unavailable prior to my enacting the inquiry (Berry & Patti, 2015). I provide evidence of insider knowledge and perspective of my cultural phenomenon. The self-understanding I seek may expand understanding in the field of service-learning. I describe and critique culture norms, experiences, and practices. I invite critical friends and readers into my research.

Using this research method, I explore, seek to understand, and share my unique experiences as a service-learning teacher for the purpose of enlightening myself and other teachers, both preservice and veteran, and school leaders on what it means to be a service-learning teacher. It is important to note that autoethnography does not seek to represent an "objective" reality. The work I do in this study is a subjective interpretation of a unique life (Richardson, 2000). I convey my view of my constructed reality through a personal narrative autoethnography (Reed-Danahay, 1997).

Engaging Kelchtermans

My background as an educator includes teaching geography. Therefore, the idea of having a compass is appealing. Yet, I also want to heed Ellis' (2004) advice. I will need to familiarize myself with the contexts of lived experience related to this study, have a plan of action, and yet, not be afraid to stray from my plan, as the experience takes me in unexpected directions. I want a compass, just in case I get lost. I elect to utilize Kelchtermans's (1993; 2009) personal interpretive framework as my compass. It provides an all-encompassing and temporal frame for understanding myself as a service-learning teacher.

My personal interpretive framework consists of two components, the professional self and my subjective educational theory. Kelchtermans's (1993) analysis identifies five components that together make up the teachers' self-understanding, or professional self, through

retrospection: self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception, and future perspective.

The self-image is the way teachers typify themselves as teachers (Kelchtermans, 2009). It is the descriptive component and based on self-perception. My self-image is strongly influenced by how I am perceived by others. Additionally, self-image is strongly linked to self-esteem, the second component. Self-esteem is the evaluative component of self-understanding and refers to my appreciation of my job performance (Kelchtermans, 2009). That includes feedback from significant others as self-esteem can fluctuate and often has to be reestablished if there is negative public judgment (Kelchtermans, 2009). Self-esteem has to be linked with the normative component of self-understanding, i.e., task perception.

Task perception encompasses all those things it is believed a teacher should do in order to do a good job. That includes essential tasks and everything the teacher feels is a part of her job. Task perception is value-laden, and moral considerations are also involved (Kelchtermans, 2009). Job motivation is the conative component, or how I act on my thoughts or emotions. It refers to the drive that makes people choose to be a teacher and then whether to stay in teaching or choose another career path. Shifts in motivation influence how we see our future. Lastly, future perspective is the time element of self-understanding. Where do I see myself in the years to come, and how do I feel about it? As with the other components, one's future perspective may change over time.

My "subjective educational theory" is my personal system of knowledge and beliefs on teaching and is reflected in how I have design my classroom learning experiences for my students. The framework allows me to include my professional know-how and the ways in which I ground my decisions for action as a service-learning teacher. It provides formal insight and understanding of the actions that I take from previous work and educational experiences as well

as my reading and graduate studies. The system also provides a space for my unique convictions, built up because of my experiences.

The border between my knowledge and beliefs, an area that is often unclear, is intertwined. Kelchtermans's (2009) subjective educational theory reflects the teacher's personal answer to the questions, "How should I deal with this particular situation?" and "Why should I do it that way?" (p. 264). It is a process of judgment and liberation and includes my personal interpretation of the situation before making any decisions. Because reflection is critical in developing subjective educational theory, my experiences have to be made explicit so that others can question the contradictions, even contribute, to furthering its validity. It allows for a process of framing and reframing and allows me to better ground my knowledge (Argyris, Putnam, & McLain-Smith, 1985; Kelchtermans, 2009; Schön, 1983). The framework asserts the power of teacher reflection:

Enhancing the validity of subjective educational theory thus cannot suffice with making teachers give up "unproven" beliefs and replace them by "proven" truth or theory. The process of judging remains essential (and for example deciding that in this particular situation the most appropriate action is to make an exception of what normally is the rule). This illustrates the link between self-understanding (more in particular the component of task perception) and the subjective educational theory, with the first encompassing the personal programme of goals and norms (the "what?"), and the latter consisting of the knowledge to achieve them (the "how to?"). (Kelchtermans, 2009, p. 264)

Kelchtermans (1999) details the research procedure he develops as a result of a biographical-narrative pilot study. The research procedure, characterized by Kelchtermans as a

“stimulated autobiographical selfthematization” (1994, p. 3), aims at stimulating teachers to look back and reflect on their own careers so that their experiences can be “thematized” (p. 3).

Adams, et al. (2015) note clues can be found in repeated images, phrases, or experiences and these can be grouped, categorized, or thematized. Based on Goodall (1998, as cited in Adams, et al., 2015), thematizing helps me imagine a logic or pattern for my narrative and explicitly connects my personal experience with culture.

This framework allows me to ground my decisions for actions as a service-learning teacher. The framework also provides a space for my unique opinions, built up because of my experiences. The framework allows a merger between my knowledge and beliefs. Because reflection is critical in developing subjective educational theory, the experiences of the teacher needs to be made explicit so that others can question the contradictions, thus even contributing to furthering its legitimacy.

Kelchtermans (1994) outlines several research techniques to accumulate the narratives needed for the selfthematization process, including a questionnaire to reconstruct a chronology of the participants’ careers, a cycle of semi-structured, narrative, biographical interviews, classroom observations, and interviews with key school informants to gather professional context data and analysis of documents. Figure 6 details my strategy for accommodating autoethnography.

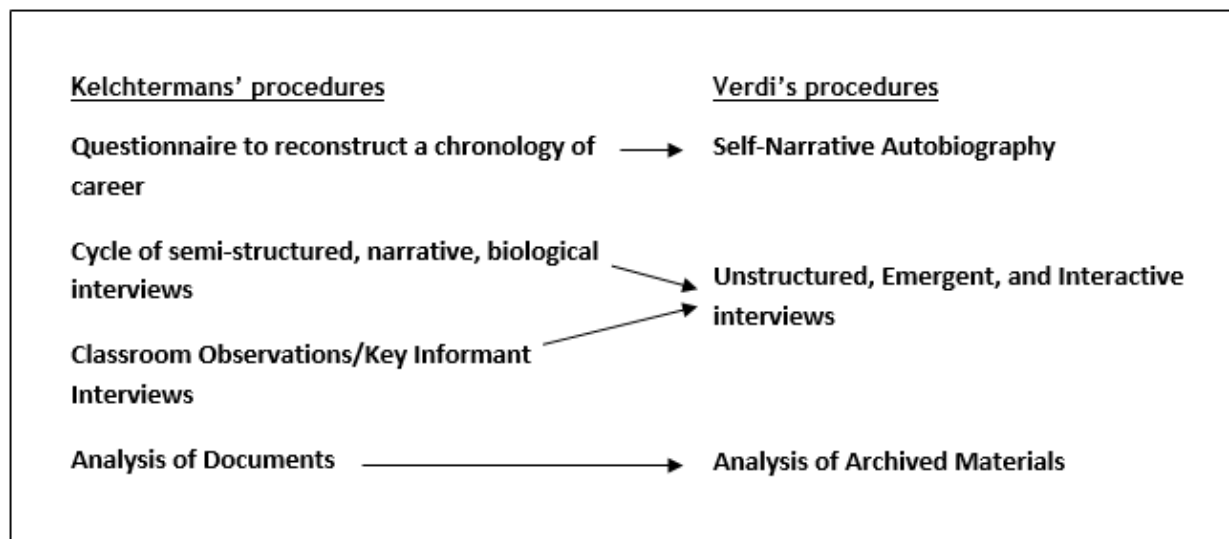


Figure 6: Verdi's adaptation of Kelchtermans's procedures.

While Kelchtermans's (1994) procedure calls for a questionnaire, I construct my life's chronology by composing a self-narrative with the help of family members in conversations, especially about events they might recall as being critical to my development as a service-learning teacher. I use this process to situate myself in the story of service-learning. Instead of semi-structured interviews, I conduct unstructured, emergent, and interactive interviews with my critical friends to help me develop my story through a "wide-angled" lens (Stinson, 2009, p. 34). My use of archived materials is extensive in both of the prior steps. The years of class notes, assignments, reflections, photographs, videos, scrapbooks, and others items help me to further develop my memories and subsequent story.

Self-Narrative Autobiography. Ellis (2004) contends that research and writing using autoethnography often begin with the thoughts, feelings, identities, and experiences that make us uncertain, "knocking us for a loop" (p.33) and that make us question, reconsider, reorder our understandings of ourselves, others, and our worlds. The purpose of self-narratives is to discern

meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived (Bochner, 2000).

I begin this study with a critical incident, a memorable conversation with my principal. Sikes, Measor, and Woods (1985) define critical incidents as "key events in an individual's life, and around which pivotal decisions revolve." From the moment I realize I do not understand why I cannot let go of my service-learning class, I know there is a story to be uncovered. Yet, that critical incident gives me cause to reflect on other such incidents in my life that make me who I am and define how I approached service-learning. To help organize and better understand this aspect of my research, I create an autobiography of my experiences beginning in childhood, walking through my adolescence, young adulthood, marriage, motherhood, and careers. It is important to trace how I end up in a classroom and how what I believe got to be that way (Warren, 2011). This reflective strategy involves reliving and a re-rendering of my life experiences. By using this technique, I came to "insights about things not noticed in time, pinpointing perhaps when the detail was missed" (Bolton, 2010, p. 13).

I have been an audio-journalist for years. This means I have been choosing to do my daily reflections via talk-to-text audio transcription. The ritual serves as an intricate component for capturing my day-to-day experiences and how I reflect upon them. "The rich and empathetic quality of voice however can more powerfully and personally represent the information conveyed in immediate simple form or through crafted statement" (Tindal & Seo, 2013, p. 55). Using voice recorded journals captures my emotions in a purer form than a written journal. These journals prove invaluable as I create my autobiography for this study. I start one day by simply recording my earliest recollections, and then proceed chronologically from there. Once I have transcribed those audio recordings, I go back over them again and again, adding details and

recollections. As I begin to shape and mold these many transcriptions into an evocative and telling narrative, I realize the emergence of ethical dilemmas. These are not the types of ethical issues addressed by the IRB. These are issues related to those I love and how I am using their stories to build my own. While many of the people in my story are close relations that I consistently communicate with, some are deceased or are long lost to me. According to Ellis (2007), I need to consider and explore the relational ethics involved. Slattery and Rapp (2003) describe relational ethics as doing what is necessary to be “true to one’s character and responsible for one’s actions and their consequences on others” (p. 55). Relational ethics recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work (Ellis, 2007; Lincoln, 1995; Reason, 1993; Tierney, 1993). As I write, I must balance my wish to protect others and myself. I carefully considered each case for its own merit and risks posed to self and to others. Morse (2002) holds that to, “develop a principle or adopt a policy to restrict qualitative research data to only those who have given explicit consent, we would virtually halt inquiry” (p. 1160). Out of mutual respect, I present my parents, spouse, children, coworkers, and friends the opportunity to read my entire autobiography for their thoughts and perceptions of how I describe experiences connected in some way to my development as a service-learning teacher.

Emerging Conversations with Critical Friends. As I create my self-narrative autobiography, I engage my critical friends in informal conversations and interviews. A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend (Costa & Kallick, 1993). My critical friends are people who have influenced my work or have been

witness to my professional and personal experiences as well as those who also self-identify as service-learning teachers. As the autoethnographer, I am not a "detached observer" (Tillotson, 2013, p. 77). Rather, I am "simultaneously a member of the context ... and working to conduct structured research activities" (Karra & Phillips, 2008, p. 554).

At the request of IRB, I submit my study proposal to my school district and am given written approval (see Appendix D) to conduct the study. Following district approval, the IRB process is completed (see Appendix E), and the structured-yet-emergent research activities begin with me writing about my experiences with support from my family and friends. My critical friends are initially contacted via an email, personal letter, or phone call. They receive a description of my study (see Appendix F), which details who I am, what I am trying to do, and what the critical friends' roles will be in the research process. The description specifies how often we will meet, options for where we can meet, and how I will use the research that comes from our collaboration. I also explain any inherent risks and the efforts that I will make to protect against those risks as well as confidentiality protection. My critical friends are given a deadline in accordance with my proposed timeline to agree to participate and asked to return the Informed Consent form (see Appendix G).

I start by having conversations with colleagues and others who relate to me in differing ways, including fellow social studies teachers, school and community leaders, and parents of students. I also seek critical friends with whom I have engaged in service-learning projects, some willingly and happily, others reluctantly, even kicking and screaming! I arrange unstructured interviews that are reflexive and interactive, or dyadic, in nature. Dyadic interviewing recognizes there is an interdependent relationship between individuals that should be embraced as a source of information rather than attempting to control for it (Caldwell, 2013).

Based on Ellis (2004), dyadic interviews are reflexive and allowed the interviewer and interviewee to co-construct meaning. These interviews are unstructured, meaning they have a clear focus and goals with open-ended questions (Cohen, 2006). Additionally, I stop by periodically to engage in informal conversations that extend our earlier conversations. Informal conversations are some of the first and richest moments of autoethnographic fieldwork (Goodall, 2000).

The dialogue between my critical friends and I become a collaborative exchange that produces a "contextually bound and mutually created story" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 696). No questions are prepared for the emergent conversations and discussions, only prompts to help move the conversation. That is because "unstructured interviewing provides a greater breadth ... given its qualitative nature" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 365). The interviews are video- and audio-recorded for transcription and analysis. I also take notes when possible during the interviews or take reflective notes afterwards and ask my critical friends' follow-up with the same if they have additional thoughts.

I engage my critical friends to enrich my story and record key details, including "not only words that are spoken but also the hesitations, moments of silence, tones and fluctuations of voice, patterns of emphasis, facial expressions and gestures, resounding images, movements, and body stances of the speaker" (Adams, et al., 2015, p. 53). Some of these critical friends are also personal friends, and they help me make connections between personal and professional attributes that help capture what it means to be a service-learning teacher. The thoughts, feelings, and memories of these critical friends have assisted me in telling my story from multiple perspectives and not just from my own. Their involvement in this research opens it up to my school, my community, and my family, thus taking on a higher social value.

Archived Materials. I make a variety of archived materials and artifacts from my classroom available to critical friends at school. Since the beginning of the course, my students and I have generated a great deal of photos, videos, websites, original forms (for lesson plans, classroom structure, and project management), news releases, newsletters, and emails. Additionally, other artifacts such as marketing tools, applications, grant documents, awards, cards, and letters have been compiled and all serve as a rich source for reflection. I have retained lesson plans with personal planning notes and both my own and student reflections. I am a prolific list maker and mind-mapper, and I have notebooks full of such in my personal archives.

Each year, the students create a classroom scrapbook using select photographs and memoirs from the projects and activities they experience. The scrapbooks are effectively “memory boxes” described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 66) as collections of items that trigger important times, people, and events. These scrapbooks, or memory boxes, constitute a visual source to spark memories and thoughts. According to O’Brien (1991), these items can be triggers to our memories for recollecting the “little fragments that have no beginning and no end” (p. 39). Schwartz (1989) characterizes photographs as “inherently ambiguous” (p. 122) since the meanings they hold develop during the act of viewing them and sees that ambiguity as an advantage in that the viewers provide rich visual data often resulting in “multiple meanings” (p. 122). According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), we collect and save photographs of people, special events, and places remarkable to our lives in some way. I have included many photos in my research paper in hopes that they offer what Schonberg and Bourgois (2002) call a “partial glimpse of a very different, inaccessible world” (p. 389), although many my classroom door is always open for guests. Schonberg and Bourgois (2002) feel it is important that there is a

relationship between the photographer and the subject of the photograph. In all cases, there is a caring connection in the photos I selected.

According to Norum (2008), an artifact has a story to tell about the person who made it, how it is used, who uses it, and the beliefs and values associated with it. While some artifacts are selected by students for inclusion in the scrapbooks, many others are left behind in large white binders (Figure 7). These remnant items, leftovers of the scrapbooking process, are a powerful source to generate reflection about my experiences as a service-learning teacher and the conditions for learning that are created in the classroom. A review of these archived documents, photos, and other artifacts stimulate discussion on what it meant for me to be a service-learning teacher and what conditions for learning are evidenced in order to begin to generate themes that are manifest. As I engage with others' experiences and stories, I am able to begin to add my voice to the ongoing conversation. Based on Adams et al. (2015) this is where an autoethnographer's fieldwork, which may be "discursive and relational, constituted or dominated by language and interaction rather than physical space" (p. 50) begins.

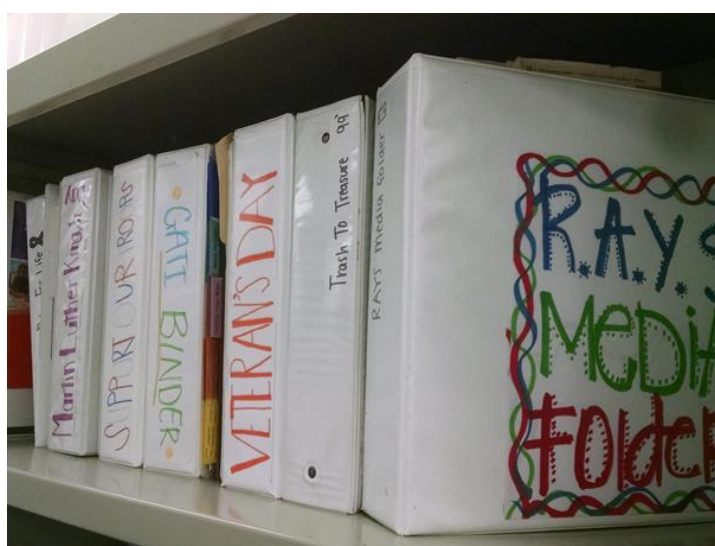


Figure 7. Archived materials from the service-learning class.

Merging and Melding: Searching for I and Writing for You.

I start the analysis process by transcribing my audio journals, reading them, and listening to them, over and over again if necessary, as I begin to write my narrative. Adams et al. (2015) proposes a strategy that begins with “fragments of stories, clips of conversations that replay in my thoughts, feelings or embodied memories that resurface with time, lines of texts, and stories that I return to again and again” (p. 71). As I return to these fragments iteratively, I write reflective headnotes or memos about experiences, and I am able to identify emergent impressions that lead me in the composition of draft texts. I continue to cycle back through the audio journals, transcriptions, and headnotes until I can assemble them into a coherent story, one that projects narrative probability, or “hangs” together, free of contradiction (Fisher, 1984; as cited by Adams, Holman-Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 95). After transcribing interviews which contain references to archived materials, I begin to inductively code them by hand based on emerging themes. Jenkins, Winter, and Woodard (2008) hold analytic themes are co-constructed during the interviews and during the reflexive practices of interviewers and interviewees. While interviews are being done, I ask my critical friends to help me select photos as well as other sources of visual data that we consider to be information-rich for further and deeper analysis. Schwartz (1989) explains “photo-elicitation” (p. 121) as using the analysis of photograph to produce insights and stimulate discussion. According to Cederholm (2004), photo-elicitation in interviews is both a data collection technique and a mode of analysis achieved through “eliciting both subjective emotions, thoughts and reflections, as well as patterns in the cultural and social construction of reality” (p. 240). The selection of certain photos, those containing the faces of critical friends or family members, require me to amend the Informed Consent form (see Appendix H) to add for the use of approved images for publication.

Such analysis assists in the thematization process, providing additional information as I continue the personal narrative and for further explication of the interview transcripts through discourse analysis. According to Berry (2013), autoethnography is a discursive accomplishment and, as such, procedures for discourse analysis are employed. For Gee (2011), the discourse analyst looks for “patterns and links within and across utterances in order to form hypotheses about how meaning is being constructed and organized” (p. 128). The creation of draft texts based on those themes assists me in capturing the meaning I desire to portray and the experiences I aim to share with my audience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Richardson (1994) states that personal narrative is a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic, “a method of discovery and analysis” (p. 516). I learn as I write that writing is a method of inquiry as I shape and reshape what I know through the process. Richardson (1994) states, “I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it” (p. 517). My personal narrative is also a reflexive process as I seek strategies to “question my own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions to strive to understand my complex role in relation to others” (Bolton, 2010, p. 13).

As I analyze my transcriptions, I search for effective ways to merge self and culture, personal experience and fieldwork. Following the suggestions of Bochner and Riggs (2014), I built my personal narrative autoethnography to include “composite characters that represent the people involved in my lived experiences, elaborate descriptions of scene or context of the story, dramatic tension created by real-life crises, temporal order, and a point or moral to the story which gives meaning to the experiences depicted” (p. 207). I develop a few composite

characters that represent a fusion of individuals present within my service-learning teaching experience. I also work to establish a story that weaves together my experiences into a narrative.

Creswell and Miller (2000) propose using thick and rich description to draw the reader more closely into the story or narrative to increase coherence and to evoke feelings for and a sense of connection with the critical friends in the study. Therefore, I present a narrative draft to my critical friends as a type of member-check. They are given “polished” (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) interpreted pieces, in which themes and patterns have been identified from the transcripts of the narratives they contributed during conversations and through reflections. My critical friends are asked to verify accuracy and clarify, elaborate, or even delete their own words from the narratives. Based on their feedback, I return to my narrative draft to shape and re-shape the text until I feel that my lived experiences have been thoroughly and evocatively expressed. Yet, while I seek to finish a dissertation, I fully understand that my autoethnographic work will always be unfinished. As my work continues, I file for and receive extensions from both the district (see Appendix I) and then IRB (see Appendix J).

Quality

Ellis (2004) holds that autoethnography does not concern itself with traditional notions of “validity” and “generalizability” (p.195), but instead on personal truth and resonance with the reader. I am “an “n” of one” (Berry & Patti, 2015, p.267) and thus, the usual claims of social scientific validity and reliability are not usual or even desirable in my autoethnography.

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnographic writing seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience is lifelike, believable, and possible. This method of research seeks to engage the reader in a lifelike representation of the researcher’s story. I seek to lead my readers through my life, my classrooms, my experiences. Additionally, I seek to reach

others different from myself and improve their lives. Bochner (2012) posits narrative is our means of recollecting the meanings of past experiences, turning life into language, and disclosing to us the truth in our experiences. Narrative is true to experience in the sense that experience presents itself in an expressive element drenched with the possibilities of meaning, however fragile, fleeting, and subjective (Freeman, 1998).

Ellis (2004) suggests readers determine if a story speaks to them, a non-traditional indication of generalizability. Again, for autoethnographers validity means a work seeks verisimilitude (Bochner, 2012; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As for what constitutes quality autoethnographic work, I turn to Bochner (2000), who looks for abundant, concrete detail of the emotions and feelings of people written in complex, temporal narratives that allow the reader to make judgements of emotional credibility, vulnerability, and honesty. Additionally, Bochner looks for transformative journeys of self that demonstrate concern for others, all in an evocative and moving story. Ellis, et al.'s (2011) call for quality includes: (1) Good autoethnography should be evocative and thus engaging to the reader; (2) It should contain rich description; and (3) that researcher reflexivity be actively employed. My autoethnographic representation is deeply reflexive and I write using thick and rich description to engage and inform others in education and the service-learning field.

Ethical Considerations

I am the research instrument (Janesick, 1999) for this investigation. As such, the construction of my professional self and my subjective education theory involves a conversation with myself and my critical friends. Based on Ellis (2000), I make sure to address important ethical considerations. I gain permission from living others whom I name and portray and give them a chance to contribute their perspectives to my story. I make sure my composite characters

are sufficiently complex and make sure the story is not exclusively my interpretation of what is depicted. Again, although this is a study about my lived experiences as a service-learning teacher, I involve others as I make, write, and interpret meaning. “Writing about the self always involves writing about others” (Adams et al., 2015, p.56). An important element in writing autoethnography, then, is considering the ethical responses to one’s own story by readers. A second one is considering the people in your life who might be distressed by your revelations (Ellis, 2007). I adhere to the basic ethical principles and guidelines outlined in the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subject’s Belmont Report (1979), which include that I acquire consent and provide pseudonyms to protect all critical friends, do not harm and maximize benefits for critical friends, and ensure the burden I place on critical friends is fair and beneficial to them. I also commit to check in with critical friends throughout the study to make sure they want to continue, or what Adams et al. (2015) refer to as “process consent” (p. 57). Furthermore, I use a “friendship-as-method” approach to relational ethics by prioritizing, nurturing, and maintaining the relationships with my critical friends (Tillman-Healy, 2003).

Limitations

Autoethnography allows me an advantage in that I call on my own experiences for the inquiry. However, that also creates a limitation as it requires exposure to the researcher's inner feelings and thoughts, which require honesty and willingness to self-disclose (Méndez, 2013). With this in mind, I introduce personal notes and reflections for analysis. I also share my notes and research with my critical friends so that they can aid me in uncovering any self-deception, or attempts at creating a romanticized reflection of myself instead of demonstrating the truth of my experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

At the same time, this limitation is related to the honesty and openness of the critical friends. My colleagues may have distorted their comments towards what they think I want to hear. To prevent that, I try to help each of my colleagues identify the medium that allows them to communicate openly and honestly.

Bochner and Ellis (1996) address another limitation in that the feelings that arise from the readers cannot be predicted. As others read my research, it no longer belongs to me. My critical friends may have interpreted my story in a way I may never have intended (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Sometimes stories do not engage with the readers at all and, oftentimes, readers identify with stories in ways altogether different than storytellers had planned (Berry & Patti, 2015). In sharing my work with my colleagues, I hope to improve the expression of my experiences and uncover new ways of seeing or experiencing each narrated event.

CHAPTER FOUR: ACTION – MY LIVED EXPERIENCES

I stand as sentinel at the door, holding back the throng of impatient teenagers at the end of the day. I try not to inhale as the impatient crush closes in. It is the end of a long, hot day and they smell. The bell rings and I move quickly to prop the door open and get into the hallway. I wave to all and fist-bump a few as nearly the entire eighth grade moves past me and down the stairs. It's 4:15 on a pleasant, sunny afternoon in mid-March, 2015. I take a deep breath and head back into my empty room. Now maybe I can reorganize the massive mound of papers and file folders on my desk. My classroom phone rings and, with a sigh of frustration, I walk over and answer. It's our secretary. She tells me that my assistant principal wants to see me in the car rider line. Okay... I wonder what this is about? I head downstairs to find out...

Ten minutes later, I am walking blindly down the hall of the main office, tears filling my eyes. I duck into Sonny's office before I am out of control. When I first walk in her office, she can tell I am about to cry. She immediately asks, "Oh, honey, what's wrong?"

I say on a sob, "They eliminated my class!"

Sonny tsked and says, "No! Oh, honey, I am so sorry." She gets up from her desk and comes around to close the door behind me and give me a hug. "I know how hard you have worked."

Sonny is our school bookkeeper and a friend. She has seen me overwhelmed, confused and frustrated before. Sonny can always brighten my day, however, this one is harder than most.

“What are you gonna do?” she asks. “What’s gonna happen to Patriot Day and who will run the Veterans Day ceremony?”

“I don’t know.” What am I going to do?

I worked for years, eight to be exact, to create the class of service-learners, and now it is gone. Ironically, I am scheduled to take eleven students and six parents to Washington, D.C. the very next week to do a presentation at the National Youth Leadership Council’s Service-Learning Conference on how our service-learning class works to organize service for the entire school! Panic sets in. What will happen to all of the projects we have started over the years? Besides Patriot Day, what about the Memorial Day display and the Relay For Life campsite? What about the weekly R.A.Y.S. Workshop and all of the ways it supports Patty’s House, the local assisted living facility, and other local groups in need? Through workshop, we have responded in some way to so many emergencies and tragedies. We can’t do that without a class!

As I leave Sonny’s office that day, I feel like all of the wind has been sucked out of my sails. I am utterly lost. Physically ill. I go back to my empty classroom and sit in my chair and stare at nothing. I am completely drained of energy and motivation. When I finally gather my things to leave for the day, I look at the stack of work I planned to take home to finish, and know I will not touch it tonight. It remains on my desk that day, and for several days after.

For the remainder of that school year, I am on an emotional rollercoaster. I do my best not to let it affect my classroom, but all of my students know that I am struggling. My current R.A.Y.S. students want to fight to get the class back, but I don’t want to put my new principal in an awkward position with the district. I have many parents who are willing to take the issue “downtown.” I put them off and try to pursue answers through my administration.

With my own bitterness brewing, I begin applying for jobs that are closer to my new home. I have never thought about leaving my school, but why drive such a long distance to teach something I could teach a mile from my home? I tell Sonny about my search, and I tell my principal as a professional courtesy. I even land an interview at the high school down the street from my home and I am called back for a second interview. Going into the last week of school, I actually think I will be leaving my middle school. When that opportunity does not work out, I seek others outside of the teaching profession. I know my talents are mostly conducive to the classroom and young adolescents, so I search non-profits and private education services. By the end of the summer, nothing has materialized, and I return to my school as a US History teacher.

Interlude One

I have a story to tell and I want you, my readers, to come along. This story represents my recollections and memories, as well as my rememories, a word used by Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to indicate that everyone has personal memories of an event, and each event is a shared memory between participants past, present, and future (Rushdy, 1990). I have not included every memory or every event that occurred. The stories that I have chosen to share represent events that come quickly to my mind, those memories that caused an internal struggle for meaning, those events that Rushdy (1990) would call "primal scenes" (p. 303). Many are triggered through conversations with my mom and dad, husband and sons, and my friends who shared in my middle-school service-learning experiences. Others are from my own very special "aha" moments, those occasions one knows have changed them forever.

By revealing my story, I seek to understand what it means to be a service-learning course teacher and to try and define the experiences that have made me into a service-learning teacher. I also want to explicate what service-learning students learn in my classroom. As I move back

and forth in time, into the past, through my personal and professional development, and as I try to ascertain my future, I am finding myself and helping others discover themselves as well. I start this chapter at a pivotal point in my teaching career, the day I am told I would no longer have a service-learning class. I will follow that episode with the story of how the class came to be in the first place, a critical explanation to frame my unique circumstance. The rest of the story evolves, telling and showing, presenting a phase in my life and then reflecting on the personal or professional experiences that may have helped define it.

Creating a Service-Learning Class

Following my husband's promotion to vice president of his construction company, our family relocates to sunny Florida in 2006. I now teach middle school. It is my 16th year as a teacher. Before I started teaching middle school, I have a preconceived notion of what middle schoolers are like. They are wild, emotionally unstable, and smelly. I realize now that my notions came from dealing with my son's baseball team—the mood swings and endless level of energy, the stinky shirts, and the silly girls who came to watch the games. Once I started teaching middle school, I learned that while some of those characteristics do present themselves, the age group is a joy to teach. They laugh and live freely, and while they sometimes smell, they are developing their own sense of style and have learned about deodorant (in most cases). They are growing physically, socially, and emotionally every day. It amazes me to see how much they change over relatively short periods of time. They are also idealistic and very interested in helping others. It is the perfect place for service-learning. I quickly find I love teaching middle school. Although there is occasional drama, the students are usually cheerful, witty, and eager to please me and their parents. My knowledge of this important phase of physical, social, and

emotional growth is not attained through course work, but through experience. As with most things in my life, I will learn by trial and error.

I see many applications for service-learning in my current teaching assignment, 7th Grade World Geography. I soon learn that Florida has a very active service-learning organization and I pay my own way to attend their annual conference in Tallahassee. While attending, I meet a teacher from another school district who tells me about her class of high school service-learners and gets my creative juices flowing. When I return from that conference, I go straight to administration with the idea of starting a class. Over the next two years, I keep working on it. It takes great effort and imagination to create the course. While I am able to use some of the framework from the high school course, I must make this course fit the needs of the young adolescent and our middle school philosophy. In the meantime, and with the support of the administration, I write a proposal for a youth service-learning council grant through Florida Learn & Serve. We get the grant, and I start a youth service-learning council. The Service-Learning Council, or SLC, eventually became the Randall Area Youth Service Council, or R.A.Y.S. (Figure 8). We organize our first ever council project, an environmental cleanup at a nearby popular teen hangout, in honor of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service.

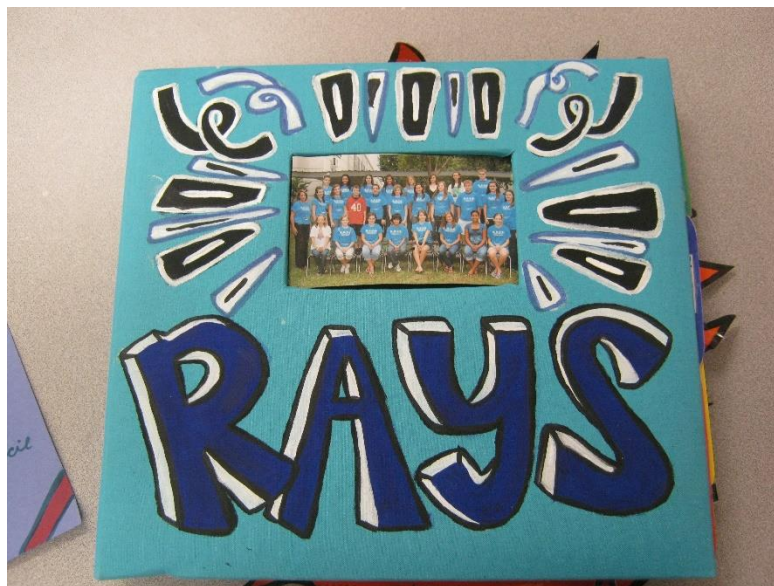


Figure 8. R.A.Y.S. Council first year student-created scrapbook.

In 2008, my principal excitedly tells me that I will have a class the following year. While I am thankful to have successfully lobbied for the course, I soon learn that my assignment is not what I expected. I remember the cold shock when she says, “I got you TWO classes!” I am assigned to teach two periods on the sixth grade exploratory wheel. Not what I had envisioned, but I embrace the challenge and start planning.

Students are only in a class for seven to ten days, just long enough to explore a subject, and then they rotate to another elective. I call the wheel classes Think, Learn, and Serve, or TLS for short. I have seven days to meet kids, teach kids what service-learning is, give them time to learn something new, train them to work together, and a day to do a service. I have to get very creative. I prepare a PowerPoint that I use for each seven-day cycle. It introduces volunteering, community service, and service-learning and explains the difference between the three. It presents students with an age-appropriate version of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) and a corresponding activity (Figure 9) but, due to time constraints and based on R.A.Y.S.

Council's needs assessment, I decide to guide the sixth graders to recycling as a pressing school issue (Figure 10). The PowerPoint guides every lesson, from the making of name tents, teambuilding activities, recycling rules and procedures, and reflection assignments. On Fridays, we recycle! I carry my recycling "scepter" (an old broom stick, wrapped in green duct tape, with a tennis ball on the end) to open the lid to the recycling bin.

In early 2009 I am told I will be able to have an academic elective course for seventh and eighth graders the next school year. It is exactly what I wanted, but I hate to lose the sixth grade wheel. TLS has established and maintained a very productive recycling program as well as given me a large crop of enthusiastic service-learners. So, with the approval of administration, I plan to teach both along with 7th grade World Geography.



Figure 9. Differentiating wants and needs activity



Figure 10. In TLS, students collected our school's recyclable materials.

I advertise the academic service-learning elective course that Spring to sixth and seventh graders. The application calls for students who are caring and compassionate, who like helping others, who are responsible, trustworthy, team players, and dependable. I do not establish any restrictions regarding grade point average (GPA). Students must have three teacher recommendations and have to answer four short-response questions regarding community interests and leadership experience. They also have to rate themselves on a few items such as dependability on projects and ability to work with others. From a massive stack of applications, I am able to select a great group of students. George and Bonnie, both seventh graders at the time, are selected for the first class.

I initially interact with both Bonnie and George in the sixth grade TLS class. Bonnie, as a sixth grader, wears her hair in cute little pigtails and has a pixie-like voice. She has the biggest heart imaginable. From her experiences on the sixth grade wheel, she decides to apply for the service-learning course and is in it for two years. George is soft-spoken, not shy, but reserved. He does not often show emotion. He is a hard worker in my class. He is also in the service-learning class for both his seventh and eighth grade years. Bonnie and George are both outstanding leaders in the R.A.Y.S. class (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Bonnie and George often led instruction in our class as well as in other classrooms.

Now, I have a whole class of service-learners for an entire school year—twenty-three students who are looking to me to guide them in service. I spend much of that summer planning for the class. I also plan to maintain the R.A.Y.S. Council since several members are unable to take my class due to schedule conflicts. As a result of a summer training, my students gain

familiarity with each other. With the classroom structure I develop over the summer, the class gets off to a great start.

The goal of the class is for the students to identify community needs and plan projects that help meet those needs, so we start with a needs assessment and create four committees based on the most evident needs: Environment, Special Populations, Health & Wellness, and Character Education. We negotiate committee membership based on interests and talents we identified through several forms of self-assessment. We walk through the service-learning framework known as IPARD and the eight NYLC national standards for quality service-learning to make sure we all know the lingo and the process. Community needs and related curriculum drive the projects and, thus, the lessons and the assessments.

I work to develop more and better ways to assess my students so I can accurately reflect the learning that is occurring in the classroom. Each student creates Do Now's for the class to do as a bell ringer activity. Students are required to keep a journal for quick reflections. They receive a daily participation grade and, because all of my students are respectful and, for the most part, responsible, everyone has an A and most have 100%. I know this grade does not reflect learning gains; it reflects positive participation, conduct, and effort. By far, the best assessment of learning are the portfolio tasks for which the students create rubrics. Each student is partnered with another classmate to create a lesson on a skill, a leadership or teambuilding activity, a bulletin board, and a scrapbook page. Photos and handouts are included in the portfolio along with reflections on the experience of creating and presenting them.

Allison and Veronica are assigned the task of creating our October bulletin board on diversity and tolerance (Figure 12). At first glance, I am frustrated.



Figure 12. Tolerance and Diversity bulletin board.

“Veronica, the rubric calls for a color-coordinated and organized layout that emphasizes the character trait for the month.”

She is grinning from ear to ear. “Yes, that is what we did.”

I just stand there for a minute staring at the craziest bulletin board I have ever seen. I say, “What about the color-coordinated part?”

Veronica happily replies, “It coordinates with *all* colors.” I turn to Allison, who seems a little frustrated herself since her grade depends on this as well.

“I told her we shouldn’t use every color!” exclaims Allison.

It strikes me, then, that color-coordination is totally subjective, as is having an organized layout. I look back at the rubric and check off both color-coordinated and organized. They have included definitions and visuals. They got an A.

Despite these measures of achievement in writing, reading comprehension, use of technology, presentation skills, and leadership, I also realize that these students have grown tremendously in other ways that I cannot measure. The Daily DO NOW journal entries give me brief glimpses of growth in character and civic attitudes (Figure 13). At the end of the semester, I ask students to write a reflection statement in hopes of capturing those less tangible signs of growth and development in positive character, civic attitudes, and community care (Figure 14). I know the accountability storm is growing, and I need to prepare for it. We create a first semester exam that assesses vocabulary and situational service-learning.

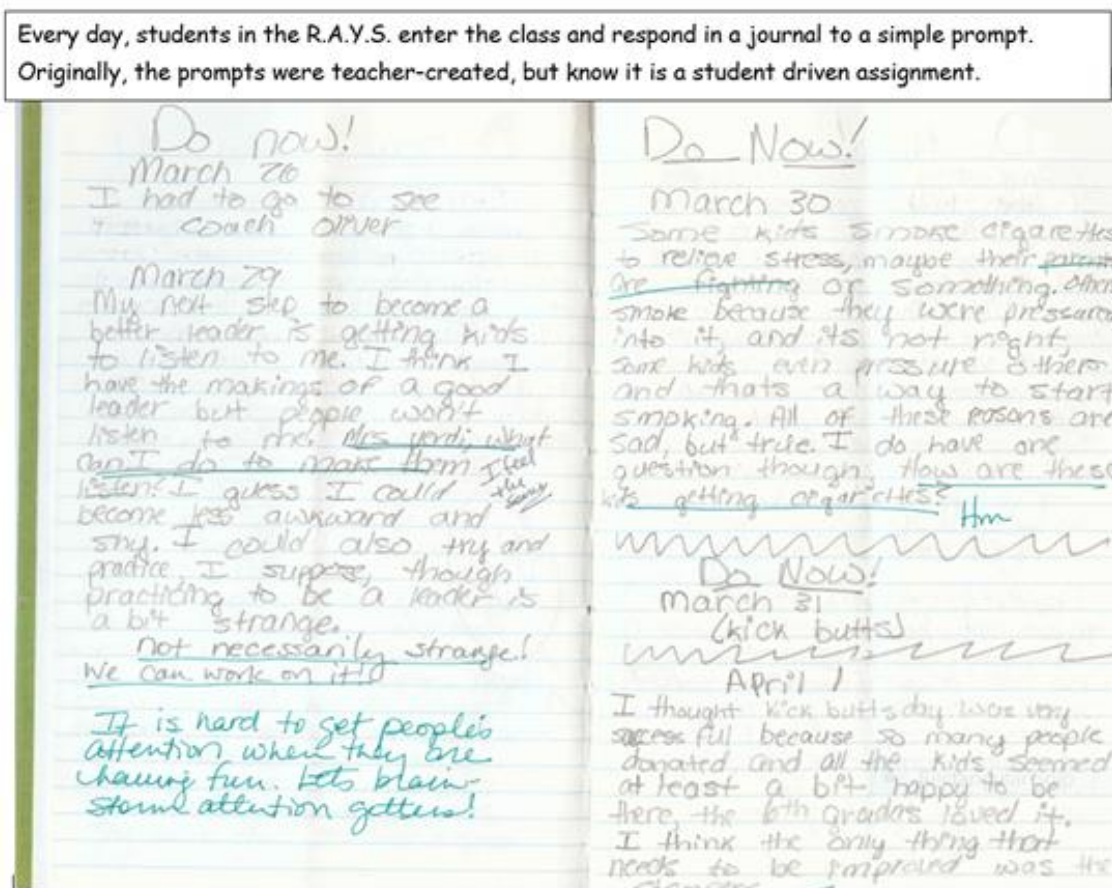


Figure 13. Daily DO NOWs are usually quick writes based on quotes or student-created prompts.

What do you think of service learning?

My name is [REDACTED] I have been in R.A.Y.S for two years now. Service learning has had a big impact on my life. It truly shows you life in a different perspective. I believe that our projects make a difference in peoples lives and its changed mine. R.A.Y.S has made me more confident. When I met most of the RAYS members in the very beginning of the year they were so quiet and I wondered how the rest of the year would be but now I know we have became a big family. We definitely get social skills from RAYS, I know how to talk to adults now. Thank you RAYS for this amazing experience. In RAYS I have learned to think things thoroughly I can research and actually learn something from what I'm learning. Before I was in the RAYS class I did not really pay much attention to my surroundings. But now I see the world differently, I used to see people as just regular people, but now I see them as a very important part of life. Every person has a chance to make a difference and I'm just glad that I have the RAYS to guide me through it all. I couldn't have done all the things that I have done just by myself, sure I know what I'm talking about but I'm just one voice in a big crowd. RAYS has helped me to physically and mentally plan my life and it is a big help. I am very grateful that I am in this class and I wish I could stay through all my life.

Figure 14. Reflection statements are longer and are aimed at capturing the social and emotional growth of students.

The project ideas begin to flow, multiply, and overflow. The new ideas add to the projects in which the R.A.Y.S Council is already involved such as Relay For Life, recycling, and Support Our Troops. We also have a grant obligation to lead school-wide service opportunities for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Global Youth Service Day. While these are actually council responsibilities, the council only convenes once a week. As I am coordinating both, I often do not differentiate between class and council projects. The students who are only on the council begin to feel less and less important and many drift away. In the classroom, the flexibility I want in the leadership structure seems too overwhelming for some. I have envisioned a natural evolution of leaders on each committee, but there is disagreement and indecision at times. What begins as committees of four or five students fractures into teams of two or three and individuals with a personal passion. Those uncommitted or unmotivated are left behind. Without specific instructions, many students do not understand what to do while in the classroom. We decide to

make small magnets with each student's name that will be used to give immediate task direction when students arrive each day (Figure 15). I want the class to be student led but realize that, with four committee leaders, there are multiple people vying for power. I have the committee leaders meet to select a class director. I hesitate to choose the director myself for fear the other students will see that student as my pet. Still, the new system establishes a student-directed class structure that works very well. At the end of the next school year, we are able to easily transition to a new team of leaders for the next school year.

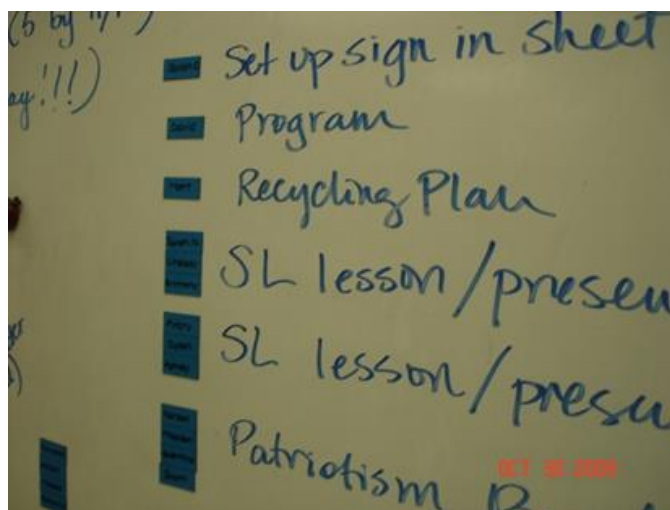


Figure 15. Magnets with students' names can easily be moved and aligned to tasks each day.

Cared for. It's hard to know exactly what childhood experiences really influenced the creative and imaginative adult I have become. Upon reflection, my childhood seems rather ordinary. Memories of my earliest years appear in quick flashes – the brown, boxy station wagon, the ivy-covered brick on our front entrance stairway, the cardboard, faux red-brick fireplace my Dad sets up in our living room for Christmas. I am daughter number two, born in 1965. My Dad is on his way up, and on the road five days a week, working in construction management, and my Mom is the happy housekeeper with the beehive hairdo.

I am always on the move (Figure 16). At age two, I pilfer my father's class ring and money clip, tuck them in a Crown Royal bag, and then in my suitcase. I am off to who-knows-where. Fortunately, my travels are mostly in my head. I have a rather large imaginary world and can entertain myself for hours. I am also an exceedingly curious child. I am always happy in my environment, watching, learning, and then engaging. I develop friendships easily but never get lonely when alone. My journey through early childhood is filled with both escapades of the mind as well as encounters in diverse environments.

My sister and I have hand-sewn matching Easter dresses every year (Figure 17) and swim in the country club pool all summer. We live in the suburbs of central Georgia in a split-level brick home. I like to hide in the azalea bushes in the front yard, sneak into the cool, red clay crawlspace behind a door in our basement, and collect brown paper grocery sacks of cicada "shells" from the many pine trees in our massive backyard. We attend a Methodist church on Sundays. I love Vacation Bible School where I get to make really cool art projects. My grandparents are all from Macon as well, so we see them and aunts, uncles and cousins often, especially on holidays or special occasions. I like to love and be loved, and I receive encouragement and support from my family for my natural curiosity and creativity.



Figure 16. Ready to run at ten months



Figure 17. Easter dresses and beehive hairdo

I find it odd that I don't remember much about my classrooms from the early years. I remember my Snow-White-themed cubby hole in kindergarten, but that is about the extent of the inside. My second grade reading book was called *Pig in a Jig*, although I couldn't tell you a single thing about the book other than the name. I remember the large poster-board grid on the wall in fourth grade that marked everyone's level of achievement in multiplication. My little green frog never hopped past the fours. That very public display of my failure in multiplication has stuck with me. I don't let students grade other student's papers. I only have students display work if they are proud of it, although sometimes I have to convince students of the value of sharing their work.

I am a good student. My mother says I always come in from school and do my homework without being asked. I start projects the day they are assigned. I like to organize my supplies and always keep my notebooks neat. I rewrite notes again and again if they don't look good. I obviously learn reading and writing, and perhaps some basic math. However, I mostly remember the things I accomplish in the form of creative projects. I remember making colonial villages out of milk cartons, stained glass windows with waxed paper and melted crayons, and creating constellations using chalk on dark blue construction paper. Not only did these tasks appeal to my artistic intelligence and my tactile learning style, they promote learning. I have kept the image of the New England colonial town, know the story-telling revealed in Medieval stained glasswork, and I can still point out a few constellations in the night sky.

I am curious and creative in those years, and develop independent study and work habits. I remember far more about how I learned than what I learned. I think these experiences have led me to make my classroom more hands-on, especially in service-learning. I can teach my students things, or I can let them give it a try and guide them along until they understand. I also

learn from them along the way. My creativity and imagination nurtured the idea of the service-learning class. My experiences with teachers also shaped me as a service-learning teacher. I can clearly visualize the faces, the voices, and the emotions some of my teachers evoked. With the happier memories, it's the whole package, the face, the voice, the kindness, and even the content they conveyed. These teachers respect me and are supportive of my independent nature and creative ideas. With the not-so-happy teacher memories, it's the harsh or taunting voice or some awful caricature of their form but never anything learned. I strive to always be the former and never the latter.

Growing Pains

"What is a bad day is service-learning class like?" I ask Bonnie and George.

Bonnie replies, "A bad day is when students were not focused on service learning projects. I would be trying to do the whole project myself instead of trying to get the committee members to help. Some students would be messing around on the Mac Laptops, working on homework for another class, or just chatting. If I didn't know what to do, we would be sitting around waiting for you to give specific instructions."

George replies, "The worst days are when we had little direction of what we were expected to accomplish. Being 13-14, we were not very familiar with the freedom of developing our own goals and would often underachieve. We would laze around and fail to really get anything done."

And those were the good ole' days.

The leadership structure for the class has undergone a few adjustments over the years as each group of students presents unique personality traits. In our first year, the students decide that each committee needs to prioritize their project ideas and decide on one new project to plan

first. Each committee selects a director that will report to me each day with a progress report. Tiny steps. A little more structure. After our third year, the R.A.Y.S. class is a recognized entity at our school as well as in the district and the state. With the Learn and Serve grant funds, which have increased each year, we are able to keep our craft supplies stocked, as well as add four laptops, a color printer, portable tables, and a variety of other items we need for our various projects. As we complete our fourth year, we are eligible to apply to be a Florida Learn & Service Leader School. If we are selected as one of five new Leader Schools, we will receive additional funding that will allow us to train other schools. All of the students work diligently on the application, and we receive the honor.



Figure 18. Receiving the Service-Learning Leader School banner.

The announcement is made the same week that the budget for Corporation for National and Community Service is finalized. We are aware that budget cuts to the program are likely. Before the final vote, my students write detailed letters explaining how the funds help them serve

our community. They calculate the value of the number of hours of service they accumulate just in one year. Their efforts are to no avail. We are now a Florida Service-Learning Leader School (Figure 18), but all Learn & Serve funds are eliminated. No matter. As long as we have a classroom, a teacher, and the support of our district, we will march on.

After three years of teaching the service-learning class, the TLS wheel class, and geography, I am beginning to feel a little burnout. I ask a fellow social studies teacher, Helga, if she would be interested in taking on the sixth grade service-learning class on the wheel for the 2012-13 school year. Helga and I met during my first year at the middle school. Our mutual enthusiasm for service and creativity in teaching brought us closer and, over the years, Helga and I have become close friends. I am actually old enough to be her mother; however, I feel like we would better describe ours as a sibling relationship. I think we are brought closer through our individual personal struggles, but we have consistently been supportive of each other's work as well. In the early years of my work in service-learning, she is always interested in helping. She agrees to take over the wheel. That allows me to work with the seventh-eighth grade elective class and teach geography. She takes charge of the wheel class without skipping a beat. She adjusts the procedures and lesson plans to best fit her personal teaching and classroom management styles. I am happy that another teacher knows and understands the purpose of the course and can run with it. I feel a little guilty about asking her to take it on, but she does not seem to hold a grudge. I offer my own support and that of my students' whenever she needs it. Being able to transition to another teacher is a significant move toward course viability. Unfortunately, it would be the last year for TLS as we are told mid-year that the Exploratory Wheel is being redefined for the following year.

The following August, I am the Social Studies SAL, an eighth grade U.S. History teacher, and the R.A.Y.S. course teacher. I am also a mom, a wife, and a Ph.D. student. I am able to go into the new year with a clear plan. I have a schedule, lessons, and assessments all planned. After a very successful summer teambuilding experience with my students, I feel we are going to have a smooth year. However, I soon learn that there is a key element missing. Leadership.

Among the twenty-four students, there is not one who is interested or able to rise up and lead the unit as a whole. Many of the 7th graders who have strong leadership potential are unable to fit the class in their 8th grade schedule. High school credit electives are a more attractive option for some students, but especially parents. As the school year begins, I take the group through many leadership activities, hoping I will see a glimmer of desire in one of them to take charge. I have a room full of helpers—sweet, nice, well-meaning, but waiting to be told exactly what to do next. The committees sit and talk, make no decisions, and take no action. I find myself running around the room, directing, motivating, untangling (Figure 19).



Figure19. Directing Spider Web class activity.

By the end of the day, I am exhausted and frustrated beyond belief. I get into my car and begin to cry. As I have done on many occasion, I turn on my recorder and talk, this time through the tears.

I guess I'm in a state of panic right now....trying to organize and motivate the service-learning class.... It has worked so well in the past ... and even though it's never been perfect ...I'm really not sure, matter of fact I'm pretty sure I'm not the perfect personality to teach this class....I feel like, or I've always felt like I have a good idea for kids. It's not an easy one. It's not the easy way for adults...to let the kids take over. It would certainly benefit from more structure...But I just try to let the kids come up with that structure. This year it hasn't happened. In previous years I've seen much better leadership by the kids, or, I don't know, maybe they've been more mature, more responsible, I don't know.

I turn off the recorder and ride in silence, except for my sniffles. My mind keeps working, running through scenarios. What do I do? I know that I need to walk in with a plan tomorrow. As usual, it comes to mind at about 3:00 A.M. the next morning.

I make the decision that the committees need to concentrate on annual projects and not on the creation of new ones. By this time, few teachers are interested in taking on service-learning projects anyway. They are too focused on preparing lessons that will earn good evaluation scores. So, my plan is to have the committees simply repeat projects. Most of the paperwork (forms, news releases, spreadsheets, etc.) that is needed already exists. If leadership doesn't evolve, at least I have materials to fall back on. It is not how I want it to be, so I also begin the search for ways to build leadership skills with this current crop of students.

Hurdles. I become the middle child when I am six. We welcome a baby brother (Figure 20). I have to move into my sister's room once my brother comes along. When I am ten we move from our suburban house into a condominium. I am excited, of course, because I will have my own room. It becomes my secret haven where I teach my stuffed animals, all piled high on my canopied bed.



Figure 20. Family photo just before divorce

One afternoon, shortly after the move, my mom and dad sit us all down in the living room and tell us they are getting a divorce. Of course, I have no idea what that means. My sister, at 13, is enraged and run out of the back sliding glass door. We don't see her again until much later that evening. My little brother is oblivious. So that leaves me to talk to my parents. All they say is that daddy is not going to be living at home with us but is getting an apartment. I don't feel any sadness, fear, or anger at either of my parents. My father is rarely home anyway.

After my parent's divorce, life changes. My mother gets a job, and my little brother goes to day care. Mornings get a lot tougher for my mom as she tries getting three children to school

and herself to work on time. My father moves to Atlanta shortly after the divorce. We meet him in parking lots every other weekend and move our suitcases to his car. My family soon expands as my dad remarries. I now have a step-mother, a step-brother, and a new half-sister. My mom remarries when I am thirteen and we move to Milledgeville, Georgia. My older sister graduates from high school and moves out on her own. My little brother and I are enrolled in a private K-12 preparatory school. It is a small school in a small town. I am fourteen and entering the ninth grade. There are only thirty-five people in my entire grade level. Most of the kids fit into neat little groups; preppies, jocks, etc. I don't really fit in anywhere. I might actually be the first new person to enter their class in the last five years. I am alone, but not lonely. I get involved in a few clubs and become a football manager.

That Spring, I try to run track. I am not fast. I am very slow and obviously the track coach doesn't pay attention to the slowest person on the team. I did my warm up, ran the straights, walked the curves, and then I sat and watched the relay teams pass the baton. At the first track meet, the coach signs me up for one event, the 100-yard-dash. It is his duty to allow me to participate, I am sure. I finish last in my heat. I notice during the meet that no one from our school ran in the hurdles event. So, I decide to try hurdles. At the next practice, I haul a hurdle from storage under the bleachers. After a short warm up, I ran at it and leap over it with what I envision as all the grace of a cow. We all have to start somewhere. I add two more hurdles the following day. I work my way up to a full course by the next track meet and ask the coach to sign me up. I put on a pathetic performance. By the time I cross the finish line, the next heat is in the blocks waiting. I am still catching my breath when they came breezing across the finish line. It is sad. But I don't quit.

The next Spring, I start watching some of the better hurdlers at the track meets and figure out what I am doing wrong. I train myself, and I work very hard. As the end of the season approaches, I have trimmed my time by ten seconds. I am still always in last place, but not near as far behind. The coach even decides to let me enter the regional track meet. Since there are no other hurdlers on our team, I wouldn't be taking the place of any *real* athletes. My coach's indifference to me is palpable. I don't even think he notices that I am on the track.

The day of the meet arrives. I'm a bundle of nerves. I stretch. I warm up. As I move to the infield to watch the first event begin, a wave from the bleachers catches my eye.

Oh, God. My dad. My *dad* is here. He came to watch me. I'm gonna bust my ass in front of my dad. Oh, God, no!

The call goes out, "Runners to your mark!" The start pistol fires. I take off out of the blocks, and I glide over the first seven hurdles perfectly. *Perfectly*. I am in the lead! On the eighth hurdle, my back foot catches the top edge. I twist and fall sideways. Gravity takes over, and I go down hard. I fall out of my lane. I am disqualified. Both knees are skinned and my hands as well, but they don't hurt nearly as bad as my pride. My dad never says anything about the fall, but I can tell he is disappointed. I am not the athlete he was in high school. And that is the end of my track career.

Despite the loss and the disappointment, I think this episode speaks to my determined nature. I keep trying. When I take my first teaching job, the principal signs me up to be the assistant girls track coach. I know that not every girl on the team has speed. I know many of them lack confidence in their abilities. I let the head coach take the girls with the natural talent, and I take on the others. I let them know that the C team, the third string, means something, and that they should never quit trying to improve.

My young adolescent and young adult experiences taught me a few lessons. First, it's okay to be on the outside. While it feels good to be included, sometimes you need to know how to be alone. The kids at my school have known each other for so long, and I am an outsider. I think that is why I try to be so inclusive when dealing with students. I want everyone to feel welcomed. Second, even when the odds are against you and nobody else seems to care about your goals, they are important to you, and you must persevere. Everyone walks onto a scene with different skills, talents, and knowledge. Everyone has different goals. Children need to know that personal goals are just as important as the team goals, and that it is okay to fail as long as you keep trying. I don't quit in the face of adversity.

9/11/2001

If I asked you where you were on the morning of September 11, 2001, would you remember? Would you picture your surroundings, remember the people who were with you, the noise, the silence? Did you feel a tingle on your skin, experience a moment of melancholy, or shake your head at the memories that came flooding back? We may all have differing reactions, but most of us have one. We all have our stories. I think it is important that you hear mine.

As the school year began, I am excited to finally be housed in a trailer just outside of the backdoor of the building. During preplanning, I found out why they have moved me so close. I am going to have to float to a room just inside the building for my second period class. I have a student in that class who would be unable to make it up the stairs of the portable. When I learned that, I am exceptionally thankful for the trailer's location. My new trailer is located on DontBeLate Lane, one of the many tile-paved walkways my students have put in the previous year. I decorated my balconies with flowers, a pretty Welcome mat and, in the early mornings while it is still cool, I would leave my doors open to catch the breeze and smell the flowers.

One September morning, as I finished up the first period, our technology teacher walked past and told me to turn on CNN. He said a plane has hit one of the World Trade Center towers. I often put the TV on CNN because I am teaching Political Systems, and there are always stories related to our lessons. My TV is already on the correct channel. I have never been to New York City, but I know the World Trade Center towers are a major part of the city's skyline. Seeing the smoke come out of the tower is scary, but I, as did most of my students, assume it is an accident. As the camera pans in closer and closer, we began to notice the size of the hole, and our conversation is about the possible size of the plane. A few students express concerns for family members that travel, but there is no major alarm.

At 8:55, the bell rings to dismiss from first period. I walk out behind my students, lock the trailer door, and walk to my next class. At 9:00, I turn on the TV and find CNN, and most of my students are settling in their seats. I have posted the assignment on the overhead, but most of the kids are looking at the TV. I tell them we will leave it on if they will get started on the assignment. At 9:03, I turn to the TV. My memory is in slow motion. As I replay those seconds in my mind, I see the plane enter the screen, the screen rocks, and then there is an explosion. I hear "Oh, my God. Oh, my God!" and screaming. I realize that I am standing in a classroom of teens who are all pointing at the screen and looking back and forth between me and the TV, most asking, "Did you see that?" It takes about three seconds for the entire class to realize that this is no accident. The astonished look turns to fear in most, anger in some. One female student is screaming, and several kids are trying to console her. Everyone is talking. I tell everyone to be quiet, and miraculously, they comply. I tell them to sit quietly while I think, but what they don't know is that my thoughts are not about them. My thoughts are about my two boys, one just across the street and the other about a mile down it. And my husband? Where is he today? Why

do I never listen when he says where he is going? I need a phone. I rush to the door and open it. I look down the hall and see every other teachers with children on that hall doing the same thing. We are all frozen and no one knows what to do.

The principal comes on the intercom and says something, but I cannot even recall what he says. I think he instructed us to turn off our TVs and to check our email. By now the female student who is so alarmed is hyperventilating, and I go to her. Her uncle works in one of the towers.

The rest of the time at school is a complete blank to me. I remember watching the towers collapsing and openly sobbing as they fell. By this time, rumors of more planes and more targets are circulating. Parents are coming to the school, and the buses start running early to get kids home. Once we are released, I go to get Zack. He is nine years old, almost ten. He immediately asks me what is wrong. He says his teachers are crying and seem scared, and he could tell I am scared as well. I tell him that some bad people did some bad things. I explain about the planes hitting the tower and the Pentagon, but I explain that it was far away from us. I tell him not to talk about it in front of Tucker, and he seems to understand. He holds his questions until we are home. Tucker likes to play in his room and is glad to head up there when we get home. Zack wants to watch the news with me. I am so scared he will see another attack. I am not sure how long we sit there watching together. Occasionally, he will turn and ask me a question. I answer them as best as I can. Where is the section in the parenting book about exposing your ten-year-old to such tragedy?

I still remember each moment above like it happened yesterday. Every year, on 9/11, I experience a range of emotions; sadness, helplessness, guilt, anger, and curiosity. I know I am

not the only one. Everyone remembers where they were and what they were doing when they learned about or saw the events of that day unfolding.

8 Years Later. Well, not everyone. That realization came to me when I met with my very first class of service-learning students during our training before school started. After many fun activities, we set out to discuss community needs we would seek to address as a class. George, who moved in from New Jersey the year before, brought up doing some type of remembrance activity for Patriot Day. Most of the other students looked perplexed. I asked George to explain.

“That is 9/11. It is known as Patriot Day,” George said.

Several students said, “Oh.” But Veronica said, “What’s 9/11?” There are several expressions of shock, but I could also see just as many who awaited a response to the last question.

George said, “You don’t know what 9/11 is?” Being from New Jersey, George has been very close to Ground Zero. Although he is only three or four years old at the time, he probably has seen and heard things that many of the others have not. I made a mental note to talk to him about that later.

Veronica replied, “Do you mean 9-1-1? That’s the emergency number.”

After looking at me (I think in hopes of gaining patience), George turned to Veronica and said, “The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.” Veronica still has a blank expression, but others made the connection.

After more conversation, it seemed that many students knew it is a tragic event in our nation’s history, but many have little knowledge about the course of events. In thinking back to my own experiences of that fateful day, I recall how I protected Tucker from the news, especially

the images from that horrible day. Tucker is a year older than my seventh grade students then so chances are that they have been protected as well. Sadly, the 9/11 “story” has eventually faded into the back ground of war in Afghanistan, then Iraq, and other subsequent military involvements. An event that is indelibly burned in my mind is an unknown to this generation. Many of my students are from military families and some even have parents who are currently deployed. Yet, they have no knowledge of the events that precipitated their parent’s deployment.

We spent a few minutes talking about what they knew, what they didn’t know, what they wanted and needed to know if we are going to do a memorial project. My service-learning class decided to develop a PowerPoint that briefly explained the timeline for September 11, 2001 and why that date is now Patriot Day. The first Patriot Day, a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, is in 2002. Since 2009, it has also been designated as a National Day of Service as well. The service, they decided, would be to honor the individual victims who died that day, since most of the students at our school may not even be aware of the sheer number of people lost on that day. They decided each victim would have a star and we would display them on our front lawn. I have to stop the conversation there for that day because we are supposed to be developing a list of community needs, not planning one project. They are disappointed, but we moved on to other topics.

It is a challenge, but I am able to keep the class focused on that second day of school. As planned, they met in committees, one of which has the task of planning the memorial. They brainstormed many things: a pattern for the stars, where to find a list of victims, how we would stick the stars in the ground. They made a supply list that included copies of the star pattern, red and blue construction paper, colored pencils or markers, scissors, glue, and wooden skewers. Once they realized how many victims we are talking about, they knew they needed help. One

student suggested that we do the project with social studies classes since it is related to history. Academic connection! I have one student prepare an email to the social studies department asking them to let their students each make two stars before Friday, September 11, and to share the PowerPoint so each student would understand the relevance.

Later that day, I asked one of my fellow Geography teachers, Josie, if she read the email. When Josie gets her feathers ruffled, she is loud and demonstrative, so I know I will get an honest reaction from her. But I also know she probably hasn't read the email.

"What email?" she says. She is sitting at her desk and quickly spins around to her computer.

"The one about having your students help make stars for Patriot Day next week," I say.

"Next week! But I'm already behind!" She shouts.

"I know. I am, too." I say, "But this is important. Half these kids don't know what Patriot Day is." I continue, "All you'll need to do is show the PowerPoint, let them color a star, cut it and another one out of red or blue paper, have them write names on the stars, and then glue the stars together with the skewer in the middle."

Josie says, "Okay, but you have got to give me explicit instructions. I have to know exactly what I am doing." Every time we have a project and we are writing up instructions for teachers, I ask for Josie's feedback. If she understands it, everyone will, and she will not hesitate to give me brutally honest feedback.



Figure 21 & 22. First Patriot Day Memorial display: Front and back views

Our first display, consisting of handmade and handwritten stars on wooden skewers, is beautiful and powerful for the students (Figures 21 & 22). The next year, the Patriot Day project is held again, only this time the stars are a little bigger and my students lay out a giant star using string in which to align them. They add geometry to their learning objectives. When it is complete, they meet and reflect on the project, and decide to go bigger. Within a few weeks, the R.A.Y.S. students present an even bigger idea for the next display. The class wants to make red, white, and blue markers, and lay them out in the shape of an American flag. After several mock-ups, we come up with a design. This new design will require more time for the social studies classes, but all of the teachers agree to participate, even Josie.

As before, each marker will include the name of a 9/11 victim. But instead of students handwriting a victim's name on a star, the names are printed in a uniform font and size on copy paper and a stack of names goes to each teacher. Each student will color two flag-patterned stars and cut them out as they have done before. But, whereas in the previous two displays, they glue a wooden skewer to the star and stick it in the ground, now they will glue the star and a name on a nine-by-eleven sheet of red, white, or blue construction paper. After laminating the markers,

we will secure a painter's stick to the back of the marker. They look great when properly assembled (Figure 23).



Figure 23. New markers for Patriot Day.

But we need 2,977 in quick time. What has taken one or two days of class time will now take longer. Less time for teaching. This time, Josie looks at me like I am insane after I explain to our department what the R.A.Y.S. class wants to do. But I know she will go along with it. Later, she says, “Okay, I need to know exactly what you want done – tell me what to do, and I will get it done. Don’t ask me to figure it out, I can’t.” So one student types up very detailed, step by step instructions, while another creates a PowerPoint to show the students.

Another challenge for the class is to plan the dimensions of the flag as a whole, then each stripe, and the field of blue. Marking the layout of the design on the front lawn is necessary to estimate the number of red, white, and blue markers they will need. We have 2, 977 names to spread out on this flag. Seven red stripes, six white stripes, and a field of blue in one corner. This math challenge has everyone stumped. And how will we make the fifty stars?

As the big day approaches, my students are struggling to make up the slack for the classes that have fallen behind. Laminating is a huge issue. We have not budgeted for clear laminate, and we are quickly burning through the media center's supply, and quite literally burning up the laminator. We have to ask the high school if we can use their laminator. Other issues arise. How will we adhere the painter's stir sticks to the back of the markers? The students plan to use glue, but the glue will not hold. Clear packing tape! That is the answer. More money.

About a week before 9/11, I ask my husband what he recommends about laying out the design of the flag on the front lawn of the school. I have cones to mark the stripes, but I am worried that the students will not know where to stick the markers for the field of blue. He suggests that I line it with the baseball field chalk liner. Who will I ask to do that? By this time, he is on to me. He says I should talk to the baseball association president. I do and make arrangements to use the chalk machine. But how does it work? I've never used it before? He caves. On the afternoon before we are to build the memorial, my loving husband is on the field. When I give him the dimensions, he goes through great effort to make sure the flag is correctly proportioned, and then chucks the lines of all four sides, the stripes, and the field of blue. I overlook the cursing, the barking of orders, the angry frustration of working with a directionally challenged helper, because I am so thankful to have him helping me.

So, on Friday, September 9, 2011, a few days before the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the R.A.Y.S. Council is ready to lead our school in the creation of a very special memorial for the people who died that day. We have a structured schedule, and teachers begin walking students out a few minutes after 9 A.M. As a teacher leads a class out, one of the R.A.Y.S. walks them onto the flag design and tells them where to put the marker in the ground.

Over the course of the next seven hours, 1,400 students walk out and plant markers to create a beautiful American flag. There are a few bumps in the road. The ground is so hard that many students can't get the sticks in the ground. We scrounge for tools and end up using the butter knives from the cooking class. There are ant piles everywhere, and we have to keep reminding kids to watch where they walk. The last batch of markers falls apart, and we have to stop and tape them. A sudden shower comes on in the early afternoon, and we have to scramble for cover. It also becomes obvious that we have duplicate markers. The only people who notice are myself and the service-learning students, but it really bothers us. It also makes us fearful that we have missed victims. We want this to be perfect.

It starts as a chaotic scene, but emerges into a beautiful sight. As parents arrive to collect children at the end of the day, they step out of their cars to snap photos. Once everyone has gone that afternoon, I pull my SUV around and climb on top of it to take some pictures. I am dehydrated and sunburned. My back hurts from stooping over. I am utterly exhausted. I have never felt better. I stand up there for a long while looking at that field, those markers, those names (Figure 24). With everyone gone, it is very quiet and peaceful. I feel tears forming but never really cry. I have many feelings; pride in my student's work, love for my husband, happiness that we finished, sadness for the people who died. This is important and we did it.



Figure 24. View from atop my car Sept. 11, 2011.

Since the first memorial flag display, the R.A.Y.S. Council has expanded and improved this community project. The project receives local, state, and national recognition, and grant funds to enable us to ensure its continuance. In 2013, we are able to produce a high quality video of the experience to share at multiple charity functions, conference presentations, and even a professional sporting event.



Figure 25 & 26. Preprinted marker. Biography of a firefighter.

15 Years Later. We now have pre-made markers, stick on labels, and plastic stakes. Now, students can spend their time researching and creating biographies for the victims to place on the back of the markers (Figures 25 & 26). We have time to tell the history, but more so, time to talk about tolerance, kindness, respect, and hope. I have asked my husband to help me every year, and he has never let me down.

I ask him why he thinks I feel compelled to see this project happen every year. Russ says,

I think it is your way of doing something for those people. You were not there. You could not help. This is something you can do because you care, and you can make sure that your students remember and that they care about it, too. You make them a part of it.

I ask Josie to talk with me about our shared experiences over the years and my research into what it means to be a service-learning teacher. I know I could depend on her authentic and straightforward opinion,

I think you have a very strong sense of community, not just for yourself, but for getting people involved and giving back. Some people just don't care. They want to do their job and they want to leave. They have no desire to be involved or to get other people involved. I mean people talk about community involvement in education and stakeholders, like parents, other members of the community, and businesses. They say it, but they don't do it, where you do it and don't just say it. Does that make sense?

Fighting Cancer, Raising Hope

In the service-learning class, students always begin the year with a needs assessment. One need that always surfaces is cancer, including raising funds for research, bringing awareness to the issue, and supporting families of those in treatment. The community has just experienced the loss of two very young children to cancer, and we have another in sixth grade who is undergoing treatment. Cancer regularly emerges as a community issue in our class discussions. I believe that the cure for cancer is in the mind of one of my students just waiting to be discovered. By building service-oriented students, who think about making the world a better place, a service-learning classroom represents hope for the future.

Upon my arrival at Randall, one of my first requests is to help with the local Relay for Life. My new principal is excited. I have a number of ideas that I bring from the world's largest

and most profitable event in the world. In my northeast Georgia county event, there were often more than 400 teams and up to 6,000 participants. By comparison, I learn the local event is held on the track at the high school, and the previous year, they have only 35 teams.

As I get familiar with the geography curriculum, I begin to see ways I can tie the curriculum into research, advocacy, and awareness on many issues, including cancer. The theme for the upcoming event is “countries,” so I select Brazil since we will be on the South American unit just before the Relay event in the Spring. I find one article about the hidden treasures of the rainforest, including potential cures for cancer, and another article about the rapid destruction of the rainforest that is occurring in the Amazon. My students are appalled about the loss of the rainforest. Not only are we wiping out thousands of acres of oxygen-producing rainforest, we are possibly eliminating the cure for cancer.

I wear a RFL “My Reason to Relay” pin on my lanyard every day. The heavily scuffed plastic frame encloses a photo of a young man. One of my students asks who it is.

“This is Jordan,” I reply.

The young man asks, “Is he one of your students?”

“No, he wasn’t,” I reply. The usual sadness I feel when I think of Jordan sneaks into my voice as I say his name. “I never taught him, but he was a student at my high school and he was my youth Relay For Life ambassador when I was team captain.”

My class has recognized that I have used the past tense. “So, he died?” comes the question from another student.

“Yes. He died the year before I moved to Florida.” He died one early Tuesday morning in early April.

“How did he die?” Yet another student asks.

“Cancer, stupid! It’s a Relay For Life pin!” This from the young man who started the conversation.

“Please refrain from calling anyone stupid,” I say quickly, in my stern teacher voice, and then turn to the young lady who asked the original question. With a softer tone, I tell her, “He died from melanoma. Skin cancer.”

“That can kill you?” She is clearly surprised.

“Yes it can. If you find it early on, you can have it removed. But if not, it can get inside your body and attach to other things.” This is a teachable moment, so I continue. “With Jordan, they found a small mole on his neck. They removed it. They thought they got it all so they didn’t do any follow-up treatment.”

“You mean like chemo?” This from a student who obviously has encountered cancer somehow, with someone.

“Yes, like chemotherapy, or radiation therapy.” I respond and then turn back to the young lady. “The cancer had metastasized, or spread, to his lymph nodes and had made it to his brain.” Just saying it takes me back. I am sitting in the church at his funeral, listening to his mother crying, to many mothers crying. I am holding Zack’s hand as Brad Paisley and Dolly Parton’s *When I get Where I’m Going* is being played. “And he died. He was fifteen.”

“That is so sad.” The young lady looks as though she might cry.

“Yes, it is.” I don’t tell her that grief rips the parents apart. “And that is why I Relay”

Purpose. My involvement with Relay increases after Jordan’s death. In the early days, I walk in honor of my grandfather, who had esophageal cancer, and my mother’s best friend, who died from breast cancer. However, within the next year, three faculty members are diagnosed, one for a second time. She dies within months. At my last Relay event in Georgia, I wore a t-

shirt memorializing eight people who had passed due to cancer, six of them in the last two years. And now, in Florida, I learn about the recent loss of two small children and the illness of one of our own students.



Figure 27. Learning about the Amazonian Rainforest.

Before I know it, my students are all in. Most of them want to join the Relay Team and actually do the fundraising. Others offer to stay after school and help create decorations for a Brazilian rainforest backdrop. In class, they label and color detailed maps of South America so that people can see what areas are in danger. They research why rainforests are being destroyed and the impact those actions are having on the atmosphere. They also explore existing research

on plants, insects, and animals in South America and specifically look for those that have been identified for possible impacts on cancer. One student suggests we make a wall of items that come from the rainforest since many people are unaware of the abundance of items we use daily that it provides (Figure 27). We create a rainforest inside my classroom, complete with all parts labeled (canopy, floor, etc.) Students start bringing in labels from chocolate bars and coffee cans, and pictures of mahogany furniture. The wall is eventually covered with vines, exotic flowers, black panthers, and a very odd assortment of household items. So many people ask to come in and see it, I decide to make it in the hall the next year.

The service-learning class enables our school to engage in the event at many levels and across curriculums. No matter the theme, I am able to guide my students to develop academic connections and get other classrooms involved. We develop ideas that bring together important lessons that can be used to create decorations for our campsite (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Learning about pirates and other cultures while serving at Relay For Life.

We have our art students create t-shirt designs, our culinary arts students make desserts for the survivors' celebration, and our technology students create PowerPoints to educate our

student body on the differences and similarities of lupus and leukemia. My students develop complex props for the campsite and recruit students and parents to take part in the community event. In class, we have discussions about causes of cancer, types of cancer, and potential cures.

Reaching Out

I am aware that the service-learning class is impacting my student's learning on many levels. I am witness to their social and civic growth in addition to the academic knowledge and skills they are gaining. But I want to expand the impact and reach beyond the walls of the classroom. In 2013, I suggest we invite other students to get involved through a weekly morning service workshop. My students love the idea and are excited to help. R.A.Y.S. Workshop is born. We start with making cards for soldiers and then make cards for a program for terminally ill children called Make a Child Smile. We make sure the workshop is all inclusive, inviting our special needs students to participate. Our guidance counselors and student success coach also give me names of students that need positive school encounters and I personally invite them to join us.



Figure 29. Workshop activity: Cards



Figure 30. Workshop Activity: Easter bags

The R.A.Y.S. Workshop (Figures 29 & 30) grows in popularity and my room is frequently overloaded. The second year, we begin meeting in the cafeteria where over 70

students will attend at times. Over the years, the organization and management of R.A.Y.S. Workshop improves. By the last year of the class, the R.A.Y.S. leaders have developed a record keeping system to help students document hours of service and have found many other quick projects we can do with 100+ kids. They make placemats for Patty's House, a local assisted living home, Easter eggs for local children in need, a video and gift box for a Miles of Smiles program, and lots and lots of cards for Veterans, soldiers, the elderly, and children in the hospital. They are simple things that mean a great deal to the people who receive them. Sadly, there is also tragedy and disaster. Through the workshop, we are able to respond in various ways to Japan's tsunami, Sandy Hook's horrible mass shooting, and Haiti's lingering issues related to natural disaster. And the planning and coordinating for each project is a new lesson for the students in my class.

When the class asks me about planning a monthly visit to Patty's House, I encourage the idea. I have always enjoyed working with the elderly. Perhaps it is the close relationships I had with my maternal grandmother and my paternal grandfather. I enjoy conversing with old people and take comfort in listening to their stories, and I want to share this with my students. There are only sixteen residents, but I have twenty students who want to go.

On our first visit, my students cluster together, like a herd of sheep, near the entrance.



Figure 31. Student talking with elderly resident. Figure 32. Residents showing off placemats.

After a half hour, they are all much more relaxed, and the talk is flowing both ways (Figure 31 & 32). When I say it is time to go, they all protest.

The weekly workshops spur my students and I to consider the many needs in our community. Many of my efforts as a service-learning teacher are the result of my background experiences. I seek projects that link curriculum to basic community needs and connect students with community partners. My need to turn empathy into caregiving seems an innate characteristic and the workshop allows me to help many in ways I could never help before. I often feel frustration when unable to help those in need. If unable to help another, I dwell on the helplessness and continuously process ideas on how to help. Worry. That is what most people say. I worry about everything. Too much. Maybe so, but if not me, then who?

Empathy. I meet Maryjane in 1973. Maryjane is disabled and uses a wheelchair. I do not know the nature of her disability. She seems to be older in age but yet acts younger and struggles academically. Her handwriting is illegible. I sit next to her and we talk but she doesn't make much sense. She mostly laughs at things I say. She has to sit next to the teacher when we go out for recess while I run around like a crazy person. After being out for a long time, she returns to school with really bad sores all over her legs. I learn that she had been seated too close

to a family bonfire and, since she has no feeling in her legs, she did not feel the intense heat. The fire burned her legs so badly she has second and third degree burns on her shins. It looks awful, and I remember feeling so sorry for her and helpless to ease her pain.

Other events in the third grade open my world. The Japanese YKK zipper factory opens in Macon that year, and many Japanese executives are relocating to Macon to get the company started. Ami is assigned to my class. She is petite and has black hair that is straight and cut perfectly even at the ends. My classmates and I all huddle around her the first few days of school staring at her unusual eyes. She smiles a lot. No one in the room can communicate with her. The only subject she seems to understand is the math which we complete on erasable worksheets using grease pencils. Ami is very good at it! Her numbers are incredibly neat. She is also very artistic and can draw the cutest little people. The teacher let her sit and draw all day because she doesn't know what else to do with her. I watch as Ami staples together several small pieces of paper. She then holds it up to me and flips the pages to reveal a girl and her dog doing tricks, all subtitled in Japanese. I make a flip book with pictures and words in English and give it to her. I don't remember whether she ever picks up on any English or not but it is a cool way to make a friend. I try to communicate with her and include her at recess and at lunch. This is my first exposure to someone who speaks a different language and looks physically different than I. I am angry at the way some students make fun of her eyes. A few years later, my teacher embraces the influx of Japanese students and we do a project on Japan. I am so excited to learn more about the culture. We even dress up in kimonos and make art. It is the beginning of my love for history and different cultures.

I am unaware, in 1973, that Macon, Georgia is a racially divided city. At age seven, the only African-American with whom I have contact is our housekeeper, Betty. She is a very tall,

broad-hipped, large-bosomed woman, and with smooth dark, warm skin, a tight bun of black hair, and a white dress, stockings, and shoes. She is very kind and loving.

As I enter the second grade, however, I meet a woman who does not leave me with such kind memories. When the Macon-Bibb County Public School System is integrated by court order in February 1970 (Knight, p. 1A), Judge William A. Bootle rules that all schools have to transfer teachers around the county in order to form a “unitary” school system (Butler, Griffin, Pradella, & Dillard, 2011). I enter school the Fall before that judgement is overruled. My second grade teacher is one of the many African-American teachers forced into an all-white school across town. I am oblivious to the political and social turmoil going on around me. I do not understand why my second grade teacher doesn’t like me. I cannot envision her face, just her anger and disdain. I did something that resulted in getting my palm spanked with a ruler, although I do not remember my infraction. She holds my hand down on her desktop and starts spanking my hand with a ruler. I refused to cry, always a little stubborn. She keeps spanking and spanking, until my hand is a throbbing, angry red. Once released, I curl my hand to my chest, and finally cried. When my mother sees my hand that afternoon, she loads me in the car and drives back up to the school to talk to the principal. I never saw that teacher again.

Tommy and Johnny are both placed in the third grade at my school as a part of the move to desegregate. Tommy is about 14 and Johnny is a year or two younger. They are African-American cousins that live together in an old, dilapidated cabin with an older man whom my mother believes to be their uncle. We pass the house regularly on our drive to see friends. Tommy is a large young man with a very tough expression and a serious look about him. Johnny is smaller, stringy, and always wears a wide grin. They both dress in ragged overalls with dirty t-shirts. Their shoes are filthy Converse with no laces and they wear no socks. Johnny makes

our class laugh with his antics, but he can be mean at times. Tommy sits in the back of the class all alone and never really interacts with the other students. Tommy frequently has bruises or a busted lip. Who hits him? How does he feel sitting at the back of a room full of eight-year-olds when he is clearly much older? He never reads or does classwork. Is he learning anything? He does not engage with me when I try to talk to him. In a room full of students, he is all alone. I always wonder what happens to Tommy and Johnny. More than forty years have gone by, and I still ride by the place where the boys' house stood and wonder.

These are life-defining memories that come quickly to mind. I can still visualize these encounters while so many others evade me. I think of Tommy and Johnny every time I travel down the road home. I see their run-down shack although it was torn down long ago. I feel the pull to talk to Ami although we could not communicate with words. I think about MaryJane when I see the kid at the edge of the playground. While these people likely don't remember me anymore than any other child in our class, my interactions with them and observations of their efforts to be a part of a world that is alien or unfair to them impacted me greatly. I just didn't realize how much until the day I travelled to other side of town.

Catie. I am not sure when Catie starts to work for us. I am probably about thirteen. She cleans our house once a week. My mother picks her up in the morning and takes her home in the afternoon, but I have no idea where she lives. I just know she doesn't have a car and doesn't drive. In the summers and after school, I am at home while she cleans. I wait for the last part of her daily routine. Every week, after cleaning all day, Catie makes fried chicken. It is the best, most delicious, double-battered fried chicken in the world!

Catie is all of five feet tall and a little heavy. She has a bit of a shuffle walk, but she can move. She wears a wig with shiny, wavy curls all around her head and thick, round-rimmed

glasses. Her face is very dark and her facial features escape my notice for years. She doesn't talk much, even when I try to engage her...only if I try to eat the fried chicken before my mom and brother get home. She will charge in the kitchen if she sees me lifting the paper towel covering the big pile of golden-cruised chicken.

Catie works for us on and off over the years, getting noticeably older and with a more pronounced shuffle. One afternoon, my mother asks me to take Catie home. She gives me directions and tells me to be careful. As we ride, I try to make conversation with Catie. Small talk mostly. She giggles a little and gives me a few mono-syllabic responses. "Yes'em" and "Sure does." She lives out near the mall but on a street I have never been down. The houses are very old and some are in very poor condition. There are a few people sitting on front porches who openly stare at me as I pass them. I do the same. She points me down to a small white house on the left. There are two men sitting on the front porch, neither is wearing a shirt and neither smiles back when I smile at them. As I come to a stop, she collects her purse, her umbrella, and a plastic bag, and opens the door. She has to struggle to get up out of the seat of my little red 77' Celica, a Christmas gift from my dad, but she seems to do so quickly so I can be on my way. She turns and says "Thank you, ma'am." "I'll see you next time" I reply.

My thoughts as I ride home are troubled with the condition of her home. I hope the inside looks better than the outside. I think life is hard for Catie. She works very hard. When I get home that day, I ask my mom what she knows about Catie. Mama tells me that she has several children, seven she thinks. Although Catie has been married, her husband is not around. She has a grown daughter who is, according to mama, mentally ill. This daughter has four children, all by different fathers, and is unable to care for them or herself. They all are Catie's responsibility. The adult sons that live there are in and out of jail for drug use. My mother fears

that they take her paycheck when she gets home each day. I remember seeing one of those paychecks and thinking how little she is paid for the work she does in our house. I think about her every time I have fried chicken. Sometimes the feeling is guilt. Did we pay her enough to ask that of her?

That week, I clean out my closets and bag up all of the things that I don't wear any longer. I go through long-ignored, old toys that are hiding in the back of the closet and bag them up as well. I didn't know what else to do. The next week, I ask Catie if she thought her grandchildren would like the clothing and toys. She is thrilled. I volunteer to take her home. When we arrive, I get out of the car to help her carry the bags inside. As we enter the house, I am assaulted by sounds. The TV is blaring in the back room. A man comes storming out of the back yelling but sees me and turns to go back inside, quickly closing the door. Catie moves swiftly to deposit her load and then take mine. I can tell she is scooting me out the door. As I walk out, I turn and look through a window to an enclosed room off the back of the house. I see a woman, standing there, staring blankly back at me. She is a large woman and her hair is clumped around her head sticking out in all directions. Her dress is stained and torn. She doesn't acknowledge me in any way. I smile but then turn as I feel Catie's hand lightly touching my arm. As long as I can remember, Catie and I have never made physical contact. I turn toward her and look in her eyes, eyes that look tired and sad. I realize she is guiding me out of her house.

I believe my distinct impulses to befriend and help Maryjane. Ami, Tommy and Johnny are indications that I am a natural carer. My experiences with them and mostly Catie are powerful and have played a role in my desire to seek solutions to inequality, poverty, and mental illness. I remember my sense of powerlessness. I wanted to make Catie's life better. I knew

deep down that giving her used toys and clothes is not enough, and I certainly didn't think handing her money would help. I feared it would further feed her adult sons' drug habits. I knew then that I lived a privileged life, and I knew it is not Catie's fault that she is living in a small, run down house providing for three leeching (one, possibly all three unknowingly) adults and four very young grandchildren, using her elementary-school education to earn an unstable and measly weekly income. Her situation in life is set before she is born, and her grandchildren's situation would be the same if the cycle continued.

Presenting the Past, Moving into the Future

"We made it," I say to Russ over the phone. It is late afternoon after a long day travelling with eleven very excited students and six very chatty parents.

"Good. How did it all go?" Russ asks.

"Fine. Except for the kid who tried to take a twelve pack of Cokes through security." I hear Russ laugh. "He got pulled to the side and had to dump them all out." And this from the student who claimed he is a world traveler.

"Oh, and a parent took half the group and got on the wrong bus when we landed. It took us 20 minutes to get everyone back together. It's like herding cats." I exclaim.

No sympathy from Russ, "Well you're the one who planned the trip. Stop complaining."

"I'm not complaining!" But I know I am.

"So when is your presentation?" Russ asks.

"Not until Friday morning." I say. I know what is coming next.

"So you can come home on Friday afternoon!" We have had this conversation several times, every time I leave him. We are booked to fly back Sunday morning and he knows it. This is his way of letting me know he misses me and loves me and wants me home with him.

“We’ll be back on Sunday at 1:00 P.M. Are you going to pick me up?” I ask sweetly.

There is a pause. “Maybe I will, maybe I won’t. I might have other plans.”

“I love you.” I say

“I love you, too. Be careful.” We hang up.

“How sweet!” I have forgotten I am in a room with a mom and two students. I guess privacy is out of the question for a few days. I search the room for a small space to claim for my suitcase, and finding an empty stretch of wall, open it up. I set my bulging blue satchel down next to it and pull out my conference papers. Now, it is time to make sure all of the students get signed in and get their nametags. After that, find a dinner spot for seventeen people. Ugh. I sit on the end of the bed and open the printed copy of the agenda that includes our presentation description:

Using Memorials to Connect Service-Learning to History

presented by the R.A.Y.S. Council, a Service-Learning Class at Randall Middle School

and Kristy C. Verdi, Course Instructor

Wow. My students are presenting at a national conference, speaking to service-learning leaders, practitioners, educators, and students from around the world. These students have planned the entire interactive presentation complete with a Kahoot! review activity. They have done all of this planning and preparation in class over the past three months. In addition, they have planned and coordinated fundraising activities to assure that any student who wanted to attend the conference would be able to, despite financial hardship. I am truly amazed at all they have accomplished. And I am all the more saddened that this class will not exist next year

unless, by some miracle, I am able to convince the district not to eliminate it. I am on top of the world and, at the same time, lost in the mist. Where do I go from here?

Interlude Two

Autoethnographers often retrospectively use and study relevant aspects of their past experiences (Denzin, 1989; Ellis, 2011; Freeman 2004). My selected memories and rememories of the past, revealed in the previous pages, are relevant to my personal and professional development as a service-learning teacher. I didn't know it then, but all of those bits and pieces and fragments, my narrative, are making me into the person, the teacher, I am today. According to Ellis (2004), "narrative" (p. 195) refers to the stories people tell—the way in which they organize their experiences into temporally meaningful episodes. Indeed, narratives offer perspectives on events and allow past memories to be fully present in the moment toward shaping the future (Lewis, 2007). It is important to note that the narrative presented above represents my life *with* my service-learning class. I invite you now to examine my life "holistically and naturalistically," *before* service-learning, before teaching, before marriage and children, through my narrative (Ellis, 2004, p. 26).

Learning to Lead

Other than the few already shared, most of my childhood memories are very vague. I still remember the smell of the freshly-baked cake I got to help frost on my 4th birthday at pre-school. And one day, a few of us get the swings going so high that the swing set tips over and lands on a boy's neck. He isn't hurt but we are not allowed to swing so high any longer. I have many memories of playgrounds. I remember the animal-shaped riders on my elementary school playground. Each individual animal has a "saddle" and is on a spring. I rock backwards and

forward and side to side. I like rocking and can get that ride all the way to the ground, frontwards and backwards. Now they're illegal. Potential for brain injury.

According to mom, I am an active and exceedingly curious child, always happy in my environment, watching and learning. I want to be involved, engaged. I develop friendships easily. At age ten, I go away to Girl Scout camp with my troop. Several of my friends also attend and we are assigned to a bunk house along with others girls from another troop. As I meet more people and make new friends, the old ones try to make me feel bad. My mother recalls me telling her about this on visitation day. Apparently, I don't let it bother me too much. My swimming skills are such that I am offered the chance to go to a primitive camp site for a few days with a select group. I remember having to pee in a hole in the woods and bath in the lake.

Play is very important to me as a child and still is to me today. I understand the need to move around, to build things, to be on-the-go. I think my personal experiences and adventures shape my appreciation for child's play and exploration. I also show signs of becoming a leader, although I might have been leading others in the wrong direction. In seventh grade, I plan a class field trip without permission. It is an overnight trip to Six Flags in Atlanta. According to mom, I write a letter to the parents, get it copied, and send it home with my classmates. I apparently reserve hotel rooms in Atlanta, organize parents as chaperons and drivers, and order the tickets. Fifteen students paid and participated. Only afterward, when she received a call from the principal, did she learn the school had no part in organizing the trip.

College. As a young adult, just out of high school in 1983, I am a little lost. My father discourages my first inclination, to be a teacher, so becoming a park ranger is my second choice. However, the only school that offers a program in parks management is a two-year college in

North Georgia. The parents want me to get a four-year degree. I end up selecting West Georgia College because I don't know anyone else who is going there.

My mother wants me to go through sorority rush. I do not want to, but she never had that experience and wants me to have it. She says if I decide not to pledge a sorority, it will be fine. So I go. I feel that all of the girls around me are desperate. They have to get in *this* sorority or *that* sorority. I don't know the difference, but after the first round of parties, I can tell the groups are very different. There is one group that makes me feel relaxed. Although I still plan to drop out, I agree to the second night. I meet several girls in the group that make me feel comfortable. So I find myself attending preference night and pledging a sorority.

I think the sorority is where I develop leadership skills. I did not have close girlfriends. I did not hang out with a clique or anything like that. The sorority is different, and I enjoy it. It gives me purpose and responsibility. I get involved with intramurals and become the Activities Chairman. I begin to feel that I have value. It sounds so miniscule, but I remember making the first award to give out to the Squirrel of the Week. I decide to try and motivate my sorority sisters by awarding activity points for getting involved. If they play in an intramural activity, they get three points; if they come to cheer, they get one. If they work, they get a point for every hour. If they attend a non-profit meeting, event, or fundraiser, they get points. Each week, I name the Squirrel of the Week and give them a personalized squirrel made out of yellow construction paper and decorated with red and green glitter. These are proudly displayed on the hall! Our participation increases sharply. By my senior year, I become the House Chairman and have my own room on our designated dormitory floor. I experience, for the first time in my life, recognition.

My sorority selects me to participate in Homecoming and in a national marketing photo shoot (Figure 33). I do both, but find that I am uncomfortable in front of a camera.

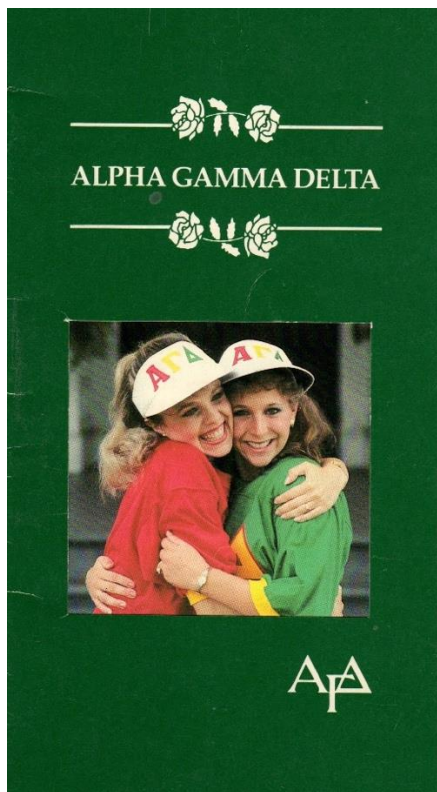


Figure 33. Sorority marketing pamphlet (reproduced with permission from Alpha Gamma Delta, Inc.; see Appendix K)

I did not declare a major when I arrived at West Georgia, so I am randomly assigned to an undergraduate advisor. It just so happens that Dr. D is the head of the Parks and Recreation program. We meet a few times to discuss future coursework and a major course of study, but I just can't commit to any program of study. He is so supportive and encourages me to find the right program, but after I start running out of prerequisites to take, he finally just signs me up for his own program. That is how I became a Parks and Rec Major, and he became my life-long

mentor. My involvement in this program gets me involved in the community. I end up taking a job with the county parks and recreation department and organizing an afterschool camp for local children. It feels so good to have those children excited to see me every afternoon. Dr. D. challenges me to be a leader in the field. He is a supportive mentor, friend, and teacher. One of my greatest achievements is being named Recreation Major of the Year in 1986. It means so much because I know the decision is his alone to make. I stay in touch with Dr. D over the years (Figure 34). We lost him just a short while ago. I miss him very much.



Figure 34. Dr. D and I on our last visit together in June 2014

Love. My husband and I meet just before the end of my first quarter at West Georgia. A group of his fraternity brothers are trying to get him to go to the winter formal. He has a huge amplifier and a truck in which to haul it. He does not, however, have a date and did not plan to attend. As a pledge little sister, I cannot go unless a brother invites me. So, they want me to ask

him, which I think is absurd. I don't even know the guy! As a member of the track team, he rarely goes to the fraternity social events. I don't even know what he looks like.

On most days after morning classes, a large crowd of fraternity and sorority members gathers on and around the steps at the front of the library. I am mingling around on the first day of final exams. I approach one of the pledges as he is about to interview a brother. He has his green pledge book ready and asks the brother's name. I hear the brother reply, "Russ Verdi." I blurt out, "So *you*'re Russ Verdi?" He responds, "What's it to ya?," without a hint of a smile. While I usually am not so quick-witted, I come back with, "not a damn thing," and walk away. So much for a date to the formal.

The following day, after bombing two exams, I am headed back to my dorm. I really do not feel like speaking to anyone. I am about to cry and just barrel through the library courtyard. I have to stop abruptly to avoid someone standing in my path. I glance up and find myself face-to-face with Russ Verdi. I stop and just stare at him, mouth hanging open.

"I am wondering if you'd like to go eat lunch?" Russ asks. My mind is still on my anticipated first quarter failures. I burst into tears. I think his reaction is, "I guess that is a no."

I get a grip on my emotions and say, "I'm sorry, it's not a no. It's just that I think I failed my exams, and I'm probably going to flunk out of college."

"What's your GPA?" he asks. I tell him I had a 3.1 before this quarter. He laughs and says, "You'll be fine! I'm pretty sure I am getting three D's this quarter, and I'm not worried." I stop crying, laugh, and accept the lunch invitation. He takes me to the local home cooking spot. We eat fried chicken, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, a giant dinner roll, and drink a large sweet tea—a meal that we will repeat many times during our courtship.

The next time we met, I am in a dumpster. I am searching for some important papers that have accidentally been tossed into the trash by my sorority sister, and she is too prim and proper to climb in. Of course, while I'm crawling around inside the dumpster, I hear her talking to someone outside and poke my head out the sliding door. There stands Russ and a fraternity brother. So, when anyone asks, we say Russ found me in the garbage. Over the next three years, we are inseparable. Russ and I marry six months after I graduate, and we are now approaching our thirtieth anniversary (Figure 35).



Figure 35. Mr. and Mrs. Victor R. Verdi, January 24, 1987

College is my time. I always hear people's grand memories of high school, but all of my memories are of college. While I don't regularly communicate with many college friends, I know where they are and what they are up to thanks to social media. I would like to rekindle

some of those friendships soon. I find my true love in college. Russ and I grew to become the best of friends as well as partners in marriage and parenthood.

I also learn a great deal about myself in college. I learn I can motivate people to do good things. I learn that I like planning and leading activities. I learn that I am a creative thinker and systematic organizer, and I feel so good about myself when I help others. I learn I don't like unhappiness and conflict, and I often try to change and improve situations so no one has to experience either. While I begin to feel valued, I still lack confidence in myself and second-guess my own worth.

Parks & Rec. My first professional experiences are in the parks and recreation field. I spend a total of six years working for two county departments performing a wide range of duties and responsibilities. My positions allow me the opportunity to work with many different people and communities. I plan activities for children, youth, entire families, and senior citizens. One of my favorite tasks is coordinating senior citizen activities. They are just like teenagers. During their monthly covered-dish dinners, they huddle with their little cliques, gossiping about each other, and make snide comments about other people's clothes and the food they brought to share. My other favorite is working with local teens. I feel strongly that the young people in our community need a safe haven in which they can hang out and have fun away from the threat of drugs, alcohol, and gangs. I work closely with a local nonprofit to help open a teen center and coordinate many fun and educational opportunities for participants.

My parks and recreation experience teaches me a great deal about people and communities. I work for the assistant to the deputy director of "special services," which ends up being a catch-all position. I oversee pavilion rentals, youth sports coach certification, 44 youth sports boards, handicapped accessibility issues, federal land grants, archaeological sites,

developing day-camp handbooks, and anything else deemed “special services.” I am even given the task of preparing our departments facility proposals for the 1996 Olympics game bid package. I decide to go back to school and get a master degree in Public Administration to improve my understanding of public service.

The director of the department is an intimidating man. I learn to watch how my boss, a young determined female, handles him. It always impresses me how she can tolerate the director’s roaring commands and solve the problems that often arise from his overly ambitious ideas. I find myself in heated situations with members of the public, political figures, and other community leaders. The department is often embroiled in racial tension. The upper half of the county is mostly White, largely middle and some upper class, and the lower half is mostly Black, some middle but mostly lower class. There is a corridor running up the northwest side that is home to a burgeoning Asian community. As liaison to all sports organizations for the county, I attend almost every monthly meeting of the forty-four youth sports associations and a few adult recreational leagues.

Towards the end of my tenure in that position, our director is approached about providing space for a new professional tennis team concept. A famous tennis icon owns the concept and wants to locate a team in Atlanta. A tennis stadium that can seat a few thousand spectators is required. Our county has many tennis courts but no stadiums. My director calls me into his office one day and laid out his plan. He wants to create a temporary stadium in a north-end, old-money, upscale community park. My boss tells me to “make it happen.”

So, I learn everything I need to know about competition tennis courts and the specifications for a tennis stadium and set out to “build” one. I price temporary seating and fencing, estimate revenue losses of two adjacent tennis courts, and arrange for temporary tents

for locker room facilities for contestants. I go back to him with a plan and a budget. The reality is that we do not have the money to create the stadium. He asks me to move money to buy materials from bond accounts that are designated for other projects. I refuse to put my name on the transactions. It is wrong, and I know it. He is so angry with me, and I truly think that I am finished in this job. Eventually, he finds the funds, and I am given a legitimate account to use, and, in the end, we build the stadium.

My experiences in this field expose me to a wide range of people and their social, economic, and political similarities and differences. I begin to see that community can take on many forms. There are communities that evolve around age, sport, religion, and hobby that are often tighter than geographically-defined communities. I also learn that everyone has essentially the same wants and desires, but that need varies greatly. My skills as a diplomat are put to the test many times. I find myself as a mediator in many situations. I learn what makes people happy and try to always make their experiences joyful, relaxing, adventurous, exciting, peaceful, or competitive. I believe this phase of my life also teaches me to juggle multiple responsibilities and take risks. These are both skills that I know influence me as a service-learning teacher. I think also that having a professional experience outside of the classroom impacts my teaching philosophy. I approach students with the knowledge that they will be adults living, working, and raising a family in a community. Many teachers are cut off from that reality.

Motherhood. I have never held a baby and never changed a diaper. We visit the hospital to see Russ's brother and sister-in-law's newborn son. Standing at the nursery window with most of my husband's family, I ask when the baby's eyes will open. I know all about kittens, not babies. That is still a family joke. So when Zack is born in 1992, I am sorely lacking in mommy skills. Everyone says it will all come naturally, but I am a bundle of nerves. I never know if I am doing the right thing. Without a doubt, he is the most beautiful child in the world. I stare at him for hours. And that is what I do for the six weeks I stay home with him. When my maternity leave is over, I go back to work. It is a long drive, and I panic every afternoon driving that long distance to pick him up from daycare. I am able to hire someone to take over the nighttime and weekend youth association meetings, but I still have so much work to do, and I no longer want to stay late or do work at home. It is amazing how quickly my enthusiasm goes away. There is a sudden and profound shift in my life, and my professional goals just seem to dissipate.

I do not like the fact Zack is in someone else's care for almost 11 hours a day. Staying at home is not an option now that we have a home in the suburbs and a new minivan. But I have to make a change, and I don't even care what I do as long as I can make enough and be close to home—anywhere to be closer to home. I send out over 100 cover letters and resumes for jobs in every field for which I think I might qualify. My father-in-law has talked to me many times about becoming a teacher, so I finally start listening. When we find a way for me to make the change in careers, I am so happy that I will be able to spend more time with Zack. The learning curve, however, means that I spend many hours outside of school planning and preparing. As the new kid on the block, I have also been given other responsibilities such as ninth grade cheerleading sponsor and Debate Team coach. Add in one night of certification class a week. In

truth, I feel like I see less of Zack, and Russ has to shoulder much of the parenting responsibility. I feel just as guilty as before. At least school leaders are a little more understanding where children are concerned. When Zack is sick and I stay home, no one makes me feel guilty. When Russ brings him to the school for cheerleading practice, everyone welcomes them both.

Zack is an outgoing and exuberant child. He will talk to anyone and is very physically active. He loves to run, wrestle, and play ball (his first word!). He is a daddy's boy, and they keep each other busy. While they are outside running around, I am inside doing lesson plans or grading papers. Despite the guilt I feel for always being busy and the juggling act we have to do as parents, I do not want Zack to be an only child. It takes a little arm-twisting to get Russ to go along with it, but Tucker comes along three and a half years later.

Tucker arrives on my birthday. He is smaller than Zack at birth, and they look nothing alike. He always wears a worried expression, like he carries the weight of the world on his shoulders. Tucker comes down with a high fever when he is just a few weeks old, and I have to rush him to the emergency room. He is such a little thing and doesn't put on the weight as his brother had in the first year. I am always worried about him and probably a little over-protective. Tucker is so much more introverted than Zack is as a young child. He does not want to stray far from me, and we have a hard time getting him involved in activities. Despite the shyness everyone else sees, Russ and I recognize his deep intelligence and a streak of defiance. His observation and memory skills are uncanny. He is creative, artistic, and imaginative.

Both boys do well in elementary school. We read to them nightly and answer curious questions, take them to unique places and expose them to different adventures (Figure 36). Throughout their schooling years, I do not get to volunteer in their schools or attend in-school programs. Russ takes on that role. He has the flexibility with his job to do so. I also miss many

activities to attend class or complete my coursework. When they are sick, I stay home to care for them, but I usually bring home a pile of work to do while I am out. I am as active as possible in their extracurricular activities. I am the team mom for their baseball, soccer, and basketball teams, and we travel as a family unit most weekends to attend tournaments (Figure 37).

When we move to Florida in 2006, Zack is going into eighth grade and Tucker into fifth. I am entering my first year teaching at the middle level. I am scared to death of middle school. Based on Zack's stories, I envision wild, out-of-control, pimply pre-adolescents running through the halls, getting into fights, crying, whining, and stealing. I learn that, yes, there is some of that, but for the most part, middle schools can be productive learning environments that are safe and



Figure 36. Zack, age 8, and Tucker, age 4

the students are fun. I want to be the best teacher I can be and spend a great deal of time planning for school. Still, I stay alert to both Zack and Tucker's new school situations, keeping an eye on their grades and new friends. They adjust quickly and so do I. We get involved in baseball and make new friends in our neighborhood. We are all very busy.

In 2009, I register for my first doctoral class at the university and start attending class one night a week. Russ and the boys are very supportive even though this takes more of my time away from family. I feel like an absentee mother as they both move through high school and into college.



Figure 37. One of many family baseball weekends

I tell Tucker, now 20, that I often feel guilty for being so absorbed in work and school, and that I hope I am not a bad mom.

“Shut up, mom!” Tucker responds heatedly. “Are you kidding me? You are an awesome mom.”

Still, am I wrong to be a working mother? Did I deprive them of care or opportunities that other children had with stay-at-home moms?

“But what about when I missed things at school or am in class at night, or what about when I worked at home instead of playing with you?” I ask.

Tucker replies, “Mom, anytime I have wanted to crawl in your lap, you have let me. Anytime I needed anything, you helped me. You have nothing to feel guilty about!”

I cannot deny that I need to hear those words.

I ask Zack what he thinks. He says:

I truly believe that you being so busy helped me to become my independent self.

Some people would see that as a negative, but I think of it as a positive, and it certainly helped me survive and eventually thrive in college and post-grad on my own. Your work ethic rubbed off on me. You never let yourself half-ass anything, and I strive to be exactly the same way. (Zack, private communication)

He did remember one specific occasion when he felt my work took me away from him:

I think it was my 14th birthday and I really felt like you were too busy to really celebrate with me. I got so upset and lashed out at you, but in the end we talked it out and only became closer because of it. (Zack, private communication)

How has motherhood impacted me as a teacher? First and foremost, I do not know if I would have switched careers if not for Zack. I may never have become a teacher. As I learn how to be a teacher I also witness my children as they are being taught. Although not physically present in the classroom, I do attend to what they are doing in school and I listen to them talk about what

they like, don't like, about school, and how they learn best. My earliest service-learning experiences involve partnerships with my sons' elementary school. I know both my students and my sons benefit from it, and I also find it enables me to be there for them in a unique way.

Learning to Teach

My father-in-law finally talks me into becoming a teacher. At the time, he is the assistant superintendent of personnel for one of the largest school districts and has the connections to help me get an internship. Basically, I will be interning my first year while teaching for half-pay. I guess the district considers this a win-win deal. I am a bargain. My husband's high school principal hires me when he realizes he needs a new social studies teacher. Thank goodness for my minor in U.S. History. I am hired in October. Zack has just turned one. After accepting the job, I meet the social studies department head who shows me around the building. I will be floating into four different classrooms. I have no idea how to float, so she explains the concept. It sounds exhausting. She gives me a giant green textbook with a golden King Tut on the cover, some overhead transparencies, and multiple vis-à-vis pens. She says I will begin with the chapter on Ancient India on Monday.

Off I go to learn about Ancient India! I do not ever recall learning about China or India or Africa or the Middle East, ever. I know nothing, and I am going to be teaching in a few days. I spend three days scouring the chapter and any other resources I can find on ancient Indian history. I fill three transparencies with perfectly written, color coordinated outline notes. I trash several transparencies before I realize vis-à-vis pens wash off. Little things I need to know.

On my first day back in a high school classroom since my eleventh grade year (I skipped my senior year to get out of Milledgeville), I stand in front of a class of thirty-five ninth-grade

students who have been hand-culled from another teacher's roster. I am in for a challenge. I have all the students he didn't want. The bell rings to start class.

I have *no idea* what I am doing.

What do I do? Call roll!

I say, "I'm going to call roll now." *How lame.*

A student says, "Are you our new teacher?" *Oh, I guess I should introduce myself.*

"Yes. Yes, I am. I am Mrs. Verdi." I look around the room. These kids look small for high school. Then again, I don't remember ninth grade so I am not sure how big they should be. I don't really know what else to say. I say, "Hello." *Really lame.*

Another student calls out, "Where did you come from?"

I mull through the possible answers. *My mother's womb. Macon, Georgia. My house in Lawrenceville.* I decide I need clarification before I respond. "What do you mean?"

"Did you come from another school?" *Oh, that.*

"No. This is actually my first day teaching." Probably not a good answer. The previously silent class begins to stir. There is movement and whispers. *I'm toast.*

"Okay, I'm going to call roll now."

"Did you just graduate?" *Please, just let me call roll.*

"No. Actually, I have been working in another occupation for a while. I'll tell you about it after I call roll." I quickly look down at my roster and call the name at the top of the list.

"Thomas."

"I go by T.J."

Okay. I stop and make a note next to that name.

"Elizabeth."

“I go by Beth.” Another note.

And so, I continue down the list, scratching out names that parents give their children but don’t actually use. I finally reach the bottom of the list. *Hallelujah*. I lay the roster back on the desk and pick up the transparencies.

“I thought you were going to tell us about yourself?”

“Well, I will but why don’t we get started taking notes while I tell you?” Anything to hide the fact that I don’t know anything about ancient India except what is on the transparency.

After I figure out how to turn on the overhead projector, I place the first transparency on the lighted top. A female student raises her hand. I point to her and say, “Yes?”

She replies, somewhat saucily, “We already did notes on India.”

“Oh.” I stand there, not knowing what to do. The talk and movement becomes more pronounced. *I’m in big trouble*.

A male student raises his hand and asks, “Can I go to the bathroom.” This is a test.

I say, “I don’t know. Can you?” They all laugh.

I decide to lay it all out. “Look, this is the first time I have been in a classroom in over ten years. What’s the rule on going to the bathroom? Be honest with me!”

The young man is very candid with me. “We ask. You say yes or no. We sign out and take a bathroom pass. That is, *if* you say yes.”

“Okay, I say yes. Sign out. Take a pass. Hurry back.” That is easy.

Since my lesson is blown, I decide to let them teach me. I need to know the rules, the routine, the do’s and don’ts as a new teacher, and I have nothing else to teach that day.

So, we spend the next hour going around the room with each kid giving me advice. I survive the first class. The bell scares the hell out of me, and I jump. It is time to move. I have

five minutes to travel to the next hall and do it all over again. I don't remember the next two classes nor the two planning periods (I am fortunate to be on a grant-funded success team with two planning periods) or lunch, but I do remember the final class of the day. It is as if someone rounded up the toughest, roughest, rowdiest 14-year-olds in the county and pooled them into one class. Over the last two class periods, I have learned a few name games and get-to-know-each-other activities from my new students. This group is having none of that. There is cursing and desk-jumping and shouting. I am at a loss. I stand there with my mouth hanging open thinking, "How am I supposed to teach these guys?" There are about thirty kids in the class with only five or so being female. As I try to hold it together for the next hour, I notice one little girl sitting in the middle seat in the front row staring at me. The entire time I try to engage this group, she sits respectfully and does everything I ask. When I ask them to each write a little something about how they learn best (another idea from an earlier student), she writes me a half a page whereas the others might have scribbled a sentence. At the end of the class, I go over to her. "Are you supposed to be in this class?" I ask.

She answers shyly, "I don't know."

After a brief pause, I say, "Do you want to be in this class?"

She smiles and says quietly, "Not really."

I am brand-new to this school, but I don't care. Whatever it takes, I plan to get this child into another classroom. After school, I approach the principal as he supervises the end-of-the-day activities, hoping that he will ask me about my day. He does and I use the opportunity to find out what it will take to move that student to one of my other classes. It works. The very next day, she is in my first period. I also get to teach her two years later in U.S. History. She and I still stay in touch. She is now a social studies teacher as well.

Only four students from that last period graduate with their class. A few others finish a little later and a few get a GED, but many others drop out. I see a picture of one in the newspaper under the “Most Wanted” section. I keep the clipping and now think of it as a reminder that every child will grow up and be somebody, whether good or bad. I think about that every time I hear a teacher say a student is an idiot, brainless, worthless, or the bane of society. Every child will be somebody, and I have to do everything in my power to make him or her the best somebody they can be.

I cry the whole way home on that first day. I have walked away from a career in recreation management. If I had been patient, there would have eventually been a chance for a position as an assistant director or maybe even a director in a small department. But I have made the move, and I can’t look back. I have made the change in career to benefit my family so I will make it work. There are many more days of crying. There are also days that I feel I make a difference, when I actually feel that I have found my calling. I learn. I learn about teaching and making lessons—one day at a time. I work endlessly after school, at night, and on the weekends. My husband is so supportive and patient. He takes care of Zack, taking him to daycare, picking him up most days, and bringing him to my football games. In signing me on, the principal also signs me up to coach the freshman cheerleading squad, the debate team, and as the women’s tennis coach! I am able to switch the latter out for assistant women’s track coach, something I at least know about. So, I stay after school three days a week for some sort of practice, one day for some sort of game, match, or meet, and then attend the varsity sporting events and other high school activities as well. Add in one night a week of teacher certification classes, and I am always busy.

This is just one of the times I look back and see how selfish I am without even realizing it. I tell myself I am changing careers because it will be better for my family. My previous career had me working long hours on weeknights and weekends. By entering the teaching field, I will eventually have the same hours as my child, or children, and have the summers off to be with them as well. After the first year and all of the extra responsibilities, I will have more time. But, when I finish that year, I begin to consider going back to school to get my specialist degree in Education Leadership.

As a second year teacher, I have a single-wide trailer in the teacher's parking lot. While a challenge to teach in (the 11-foot by 50-foot space meant student desks are in two long rows and the kids on the end have to lean in to see the board), I am so happy to have my own Classroom (Figure 38).



Figure 38. The long and narrow portable interior

My first experiences teaching in high school shape me in many ways. I learn that the high school classrooms have their own social issues; racial discrimination and tensions, teen pregnancy, religious intolerance. I realize in these early years that what I am teaching my students has little relevance to their lives and they are bored. I began looking for ways to make it more engaging. I call on guest speakers as often as I can. I do not hesitate to find the most knowledgeable people on a topic. I call the University of Georgia and somehow convince two of their leading professors to make a trip to our school and teach class with me. We learn all about Ancient Chinese history and African archaeology from the masters. However, I still need a way for the historical people we discuss to come alive for my students. The idea for a Utopian School develops in one of my classes as we discuss Sir Thomas More's concept of a perfect society. I ask students if they want to plan a perfect high school and they get very excited. I lay out the requirements; The school needs a name, a mascot, a banner, a spirit song (all of which have to connect to one of the medieval or renaissance societies we have discussed) and a full faculty. They have to select historical figures for each position and justify their selection with known facts. I create a rubric that explains how I will score it. My students have so much fun with this project. They add components such as the physical layout of the school and extra jobs (custodians, librarians, lunch ladies!). The end products are so entertaining but also demonstrate historical knowledge. My wheels start spinning after that project.

I am finally asked to teach Political Systems, and I am so excited. I binge on books to enhance my knowledge of government so that I will be prepared to teach what I consider to be the most important of the social studies. I contact the office of a popular U.S. Senator who is up for re-election to see if he can visit our school and talk to my students. Luckily, I ask before I confirmed the visit. While I am technically not new to teaching, I am still inexperienced. Why

else would a popular incumbent, in the heat of a high-profile re-election campaign, want to visit my classroom? Photo op! On the day of the “visit,” our school is overrun with TV stations and journalists from all over. Thankfully, my principal has district public relations personnel there to handle them. My job is to make sure the senator does not campaign (no buttons, ribbons, tokens, etc.) and to make sure he speaks about his job, not about how my students can help him get re-elected. His visit is very powerful, and his story keeps the students’ interest. The senator is a triple amputee. His injuries, the result of a horrible accident, occurred in Vietnam. Upon reflection, I think the lesson that day is more about perseverance than politics, and I realize how much more powerful it is for students to meet real people from the real world.

Those early years in the classroom give me my initial professional development in education. I have no formal training in instructional strategy, classroom management, or child psychology. It is complete on-the-job training. I primarily learn by watching others, listening, and reading anything I can get my hands on. I also learn about students’ needs and how much they vary. It seems my naturally-developing practices actually have names, and most are supported by research. My use of authentic assessment and experiential education evolve from seeking to make the material I teach more interesting and engaging for students. I learn more about community and the impact of rapidly changing demographics. My first year as a teacher is the greatest challenge I ever face up to that point in my life. For years, I told myself that if I survived that year, I can survive anything. I just have to remember to take it one day at a time.

Seeing the Service in Learning

After five years, I transfer to a new high school a mile from our new home. My new school is across the street from Zack’s elementary school and a mile away from Tucker’s day care. The high school, despite just opening a year earlier in 1998, is already overflowing. It is

over capacity by about 800 students. It is like living in a small city. As a new transfer, I am assigned to a portable. The newer trailers are still long and skinny, but add about two feet of width to the old version I had in the years before. These also have new, light-colored walls, no holes in the floor or ceiling, and a solid set of newly constructed wooden steps. I'm happy. I'm in portable number 55 at the farthest location from the school. I can't complain. Well, maybe a little.

My trailer sits at the bottom of a muddy slope. When it rains, the mud pours down the slope and pools at the bottom of the steps to my portable. On rainy days, a frequent occurrence in Georgia, my students come in with their shoes soaked and caked in mud. None of the pathways to the portables are paved. The kids complain about their ruined shoes. I complain about my nasty carpet. I try sending an email to someone about getting sidewalks to the portables, but I am told that because the portable "village" is a temporary solution to overcrowding, they will not install permanent sidewalks. Then, a student comes to me and asks about laying down stepping stones.

The rest is history. That is how the whole *Trash to Treasure* project came to be. One class period plans the whole project. I am able to keep it connected to World History by requiring historical scenes to be painted on the square stones, but the focus clearly became getting a pathway through the trailer park. My students write letters to Lowe's about concrete tiles and plants for the muddy hillside, Benjamin Sherwin for paint, and the Transportation Department for street signs. Other students hear about our project and want to get involved, so we invite other teachers to design paintings for sections of tiles. The whole community is pulling together.

I am visited by the media center specialist and learn she plays an additional role at our school. She is the service-learning coordinator. I have no idea what that means, but she says she can give me a \$1000 grant if I can get \$1000 worth of materials donated. Lowe's matches the grant. They even agree to come out and show the students the proper way to lay the tiles. So, over the next week, my students coordinate with other classes to go out to the tennis courts (which are scheduled to be resurfaced) and paint the tiles. It is amazing. In all, about ten teachers have their classes participate in either painting or laying tiles. My students organize groups to do the planting and have enough money to buy five picnic tables which the students assemble. My one class period organizes everything and does an amazing job.

A few weeks after we are done, we plan a ribbon cutting and celebration. My principal comes out to my trailer to speak to my class afterwards. A few students have assembled a binder and put all of the emails, flyers, letters, and pictures we have taken together to document our project, and I notice my principal looking through it while my students are happily eating cake and drinking sodas, my surprise gift to them for their accomplishments. After telling my students how impressed and proud he is, he turns to me.

He says, "Do you know what you have done?" He is a tall, serious man with a stern façade, but I know he is kind. I hope he isn't about to tell me all the things I have done wrong. I did get his permission, although he probably has no idea of the scope of the project.

And then he says, "You gave them purpose."

"I did?" I hear myself say.

He smiles, "Yes, you gave them a purpose to learn."

"Thank you," I say, a little perplexed.

He gives me a puzzled look, "No," he says, "Thank *you*."

His message goes right to my heart, and it remains there. This is the moment when I realized that there are so many needs all around us and that my students will be more engaged in learning if they are trying to do something about them. After that first project, I begin to look at my classroom very differently. It is filled with young, energetic, creative, knowledgeable students who want very much to be involved. I get more involved in service myself and even try to impress upon my own children the importance of helping others (Figure 39).



Figure 39. I took Tucker to a food bank for National Family Volunteer Day (reproduced with permission from Gwinnett Daily Post; see Appendix L)

I go on to teach World History, American History, Geography, and Political Systems at the high school. I find more and more ways to integrate service-learning into those curricula and get many other teachers involved as well. I am constantly taking my students across the street to teach the elementary school students, including Zack and then Tucker. My U.S. History students teach about Manifest Destiny and compose children's book on inventions during the Industrial Revolution. (Figure 40). It became natural for me to see needs and match them with academics. I come to accept that this is how my brain works.



Figure 40. Eleventh graders teaching fourth graders about Manifest Destiny

After that pivotal experience, I face the fact that most students come to school because it is expected of them. This expectation is completely societal and rarely personal in a child. They are either forced, come to please their parents, come to socialize, or come to get an arbitrary letter grade. Yes, a few may even darken the classroom door simply because they have a thirst for knowledge, but they could quench that thirst in a variety of different ways than a traditional four-walled classroom. If we want them to want to be there, they must feel they have purpose. They must feel the tasks are relevant and the outcomes are meaningful. Service-learning sets us all on the same path. Anything else is at cross-purposes. Using service-learning as an instructional strategy becomes my norm. After seven years of high school, I carry my experiences to the elementary school as a fourth grade teacher. At the time, I need a change and I am hoping to open doors to an administrative position at the elementary level. Only a few months in and we learn we are planning a move to Florida. Where will I end up? Wherever it is, I'll be doing service-learning.

Interlude Three

I am a social studies teacher and I know what that means. I teach my students history, geography, civics, and economics. As a middle level teacher, I am also teaching students social and emotional skills as well as how to be a responsible student and lifelong learner. Does my role as a service-learning course teacher differ from that description? As I reveal my lived experiences before and during my time as a service-learning course teacher, I attempt to judge the ethical, emotional, practical, and fateful demands of my life as I come to understand them (Jackson, 1989). I continue here with my story after the loss of my service-learning class. As I flip through one of the end-of-the-year scrapbooks created by students in my service-learning class, I come across this poem written by one of my R.A.Y.S. (Randall Area Youth Service) class members a few years earlier. It reminds me why I have poured my heart and soul into creating the course. It reminds me why my pain at the loss of the class is so palpable.

*In R.A.Y.S. we bond
As our hearts become one
We think of each other
Always helping someone*

*On the field trip, we fought
The fears that we thought
We would never overcome
And bravery we sought*

*Classes helped us educate
The mistakes that we've made
New ideas have blossomed
Tomorrow's a new day*

*In our scrapbooks we show
The memories we will know
That will help us change
And then we will grow*

*As we work every hour
Our minds full of power*

*We contribute to others
To help them shine brighter*

*As this year ends
And a new year begins
We will be separated
But we will always be friends*

Student Poem from scrapbook (2013)

Classlessness

As the 2015-16 school year unfolds, I must adapt to life without a service-learning class. I have some important decisions to make. I can allow the R.A.Y.S. Council to disappear along with the class and no one would blame me. That would be the low road, and I just can't do that. The R.A.Y.S. program and service-learning are a part of who I am. I find that I cannot fully take the high road either. For once in my life, I feel old and tired. I realize, with the professional turmoil of the last two years, the stress of moving into a new home, worrying about two boys in college, attempting to write a successful dissertation, and recovering from a fairly serious accident, I am simply exhausted. I settle for the middle ground. I do what I am able to do and try not to stress over the rest. We will have a council, and we will try to continue all of the projects we started.

As soon as the school year begins, I communicate with the staff to find teachers or other groups that are interested in taking over some of the projects that the service-learning class has done in the past. If no one responds, I promise myself, I will not stress over them. It is very difficult, but the first project to disappear is the Support Our Troops care package drive. I sent out an email asking if there is a teacher who would want to take over Support Our Troops. Almost everything would be ready for them; the list of items to collect, the plastic bags, materials for cards. All they would have to do is make collection boxes and posters and

advertise it to the school. No one replied. It is late second semester when it hit me that this is the first year in ten that our school did not host a collection for our soldiers.

The principal asks others to take over Veterans Day plans, but no one replies and I coordinate the guest speaker and the annual Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) presentation. We did recruit our special education teacher to organize the reception for our guests, and her students are very excited to help serve at the function.

With the class eliminated, I have to make choices about the projects I will try and continue through a youth council. I want to continue R.A.Y.S. Workshop, but with no class to plan a weekly workshop, I try for once a month. It is not the same. Patriot Day, Veterans Day, and Great American Teach-In, all in the Fall, are going to be a challenge. Add to that my new responsibilities based on the grant we have received.

When the council meets, I explain the grant obligations to my students. According to Youth Serve America, the organization who monitors the grant, we are supposed to plan projects for the Martin Luther King Day of Service in January and Global Youth Service Day in April. Since we have planned something for each of these days of service in the past, it is an expectation anyway. I tell the small group of experienced eighth graders and the larger group of novice service-learners that what we accomplish depends on them. We outline a plan of action for the school year that we feel we can handle. First, we have to host our Patriot Day memorial project. The council, however, is barely able to function. We try to meet every Thursday morning, but that is a challenge. Between my duties as the Subject Area leaders (SAL) and my role on the Instructional Lead Team (ILT), and active students involved in a variety of other activities, our productive meetings are sporadic. I have a core of seven eighth graders from the class the year before, but without regular meetings for teambuilding and planning, the council

becomes a committed group of errand-runners. How do I persevere? This is me! And I don't quit!

A Challenge

The council decides that 2015 Great American Teach-In (GATI) will be the kick-off event for our Martin Luther King Day of Service efforts. Two council members take a special request to our principal. They ask if we can declare the last day of first semester, a Friday, as a Day of Service and coordinate multiple service opportunities for our student body. She agrees, and our plans begin to take shape. The council members coordinate through Edsby to create a new PowerPoint for a Service-Learning Challenge Week that will take place in every homeroom in mid-October. The presentation encourages students to become aware of community needs and think of ways to address those needs through academic learning. By the end of the week, it is our hope that students would be initiating conversations about ways to meet community needs in their classrooms. That would set us up for the GATI in November. If a class expressed interest, the council would teach them how to start the process of planning a service project that would take place on our Day of Service.

During the GATI, the council members present to almost 30 classes. Before we leave for winter break, we plan four off-site service-learning projects, one pre-service site visit, and five on-campus service-learning projects that will engage more than half of our student body in meaningful service. The motivations for these projects came from varying sources: a classroom teacher, a student or a group of students, or even a parent. I could ask the teacher to take on the responsibility of planning and preparation for the project and encourage the teacher to get students and/or parents to help; but, ultimately, it is left up to me to handle many of the details and make sure our Day of Service is well-organized. That period of time is when the loss of the

class is most evident. I am able to pull a few council members from elective classes to help me on occasion, but much of the work has to be done during ISS and during my planning period or outside of school hours.

After GATI, I ask Tony how the R.A.Y.S. did when they presented to his classes (Figure 41). He said, “Amazing, as always!” Tony is one teacher who always asks for the R.A.Y.S. to present. Tony teaches seventh and eighth grade Language Arts at my school. Talking to Tony is always an adventure. Once upon a time, we were seventh grade teammates, back when teaming is still around. He is such an uplifting person and can always make me laugh. He makes his students laugh as well and can often be heard giving the middle school play-by-play in his class or on the seventh grade hall, through his bullhorn no less.

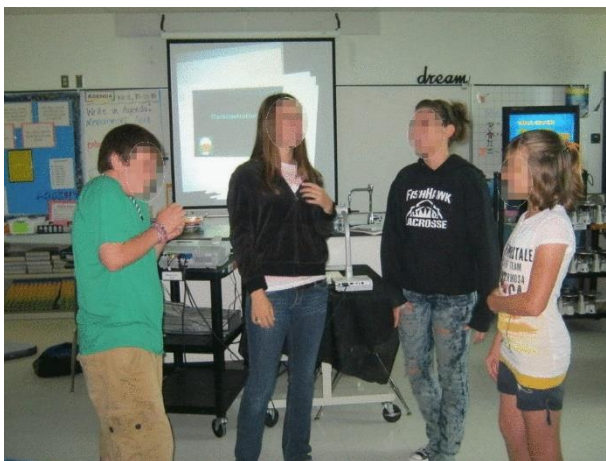


Figure 41. Students teaching students.

Tony laughs and continues, “I saw one of my former students today, and I could not believe the change!” He recounted his memories of this former student on the first day of seventh grade.

“I tell you, if I walked into McDonald’s and saw him working there, I would have turned around and walked out. I would be scared of any hamburger he made!” Tony worried he didn’t know which end was up.

This young man ended up in my service-learning class, and the transformation the young man has undergone is extraordinary. Tony also shared a vivid memory about another young lady who, while also presenting to his class, showed great poise and confidence although only an eighth grader. Tony is surprised when that young presenter emphatically urged his students to go out into their own communities and identify needs. “That is a very powerful message for a young person to express to her peers.”

A project idea emerges from Helga’s second period Civics class during the Service-Learning Challenge Week just after we finish the Patriot Day memorial. Helga led her students into a discussion about the importance of memorials and a student expressed interest in helping expand our annual Memorial Day display in May. By the end of the class period, the students have come up with several ideas. Helga proposes that they visit a local Veterans memorial on our Day of Service as part of the investigation process and the students begin making arrangements for the field trip.

In December, I attend the Superintendent’s Forum at the school board building to ask him about the loss of the elective course. I am the second speaker. I start my dialogue with a reference to the previous speaker’s comments about the loss of academic learning in elementary grades, especially the social studies. I then read from my script asking about his plans to implement service-learning as a core principle for the district. The next day, I receive several emails from teachers who have seen my name in media related to the forum. My reference to the loss of social studies made it into the news. There is nothing about the loss of the service-

learning class. Does anyone care about service-learning like I do? Are my efforts to restore the class pointless? I say I am doing it for my students, but do they really need it? Want it?

The week before the Day of Service, I meet with the council, and we go over all of the planned projects and make sure we are prepared, and we are, except for Alex. Alex, an unusually early tropical storm, comes in from the Caribbean Sea and sweeps up through Tampa Bay on the eve of our Day of Service. The weather forecast calls for torrential rains through Friday. On Thursday at noon, I am forced to cancel all of the off-campus field trips. By the next morning, I have to cancel the rest because of the high absentee rate of both students and teachers.

In some ways, the postponement of our Day of Service is a blessing. There has been little time after the winter break to get students signed up for the various field trips. One sixth grade science teacher has enthusiastically embraced a project idea, and I have encouraged her to expand it to the other sixth grade science classrooms. I try to smooth the way and help with communication, but something goes awry in the communication, and we don't have many students sign up. Once we reschedule for a late March date, we have plenty of time to recruit, and I end up adding trips and buses, which means I need more teachers and chaperons who are willing to go. Another challenge as we get closer to testing season.

We are able to host our Day of Service in late March. I sit down to talk with Helga shortly after the Day of Service. She has taken her Civics class to a local Veterans Park to learn more about memorials in preparation for expanding our Memorial Day tribute to Florida's fallen service members. I know from the pictures and text messages she sent me during the trip that it is a wonderful experience for her and her students.

"Oh, my God! This is amazing!" She shouts over the phone when I check in with her.

Upon her return, she is eager to tell me how much her students gained from the experience.

“They were absolutely riveted as the Veterans told them about each memorial. They were in awe of the men who came out to show them around and teach them about all of the wars in which our service members have served. They learned so much.”

And this is only on the site visit. They begin to make their plans for Memorial Day.

Memorial Day

Thankfully, Helga’s second period class has taken on the final annual project, Memorial Day, a project we started in 2011. George, greatly humbled when his grandfather, a World War II veteran, had been able to attend our Veterans Day ceremony, felt that we needed to do something for service members who died serving our nation. After discussing his idea in class, we all came to realize the magnitude. We decide to focus on one particular group. We decide to honor all Florida service members who have died since the War on Terror began after 9/11. The R.A.Y.S. Council has maintained and updated the display each year since.

On the Friday before each Memorial Day, every social studies teacher presents a student-created lesson on the meaning of the national holiday. They then lead their classes outside to the front of the school. On the long row of windows across the front of the school, there are red and blue strips of laminated construction paper. On these strips, there are white “plaques” for every service member from Florida who has died since the beginning of the War on Terror. Each white plaque contains the name, rank, military branch, hometown, age, and date of death for an individual. There are over 400 names on display.



Figure 42. Students put up the Memorial Day display

Each teacher is given a few pictures of service members and paper roses. The name of the service member is on the back of the picture. The students look through the names until they find the service member and then tape the photo and rose by their name (Figure 42). The end of the day reveals a beautiful display of names, photo, and flowers. We invite the public to drive by and see the display over the holiday weekend.

On the Friday morning Helga and her class start to put up the 2016 display. It may likely be that last since the school year has been adjusted to end before Memorial Day in 2017. As I stand back for a look, I am taken back in time to the very first time we did this in 2011.

We have just gotten the banner up over the door and I walk in the front office. I am handed a message by the secretary. It states, simply, “Memorial Day display” and there is a phone number. I assume it is a reporter. I call the number.

The lady who answers introduces herself. “Hello, Kristy. My name is Della. My son, John, was killed in Iraq in 2005. He was 21-years-old.”

I am rendered speechless for a moment. “Hello,” is all that comes out.

She asks if she can meet me at the school that afternoon. “Oh, of course. Love to. I can meet you anytime, but I have a planning period at 2:30.”

She says, “Perfect, I’ll see you then, I have something to give you.”

When the time arrives, I wait anxiously out front. I watch as a lady pulls in and parks. She has blonde hair and is wearing a red, white, and blue shirt. I approach her as she nears the front of the school, hoping I have the right person.

“Kristy?” she says.

“Yes,” I answer enthusiastically. “I am so glad you came by.”

“I’m so glad to be here. I read about this in the paper and wanted to come by and see it.” Her eyes are focused on the wall of red, white, and blue.”

“Well, let’s go see it.” We walk, and I explain that the wall is organized by hometown. I am shocked to find out that she is actually from our town. We find her son’s name immediately.

I watch as she reaches up and gently puts her finger by his name. I know this has to be hard. We both are misty-eyed, but she holds it together.

After a minute I ask, “Can you tell me about him?” By this time, a class of students is coming out to see the display.

“Yes, I’d love to.” She stops and looks down at an envelope she holds in her hand. “I brought you some pictures.” As she pulls the first one out, I can’t help but tear-up. Seeing the face of her dead son in her hand is so much different than seeing the faces of the others posted on the wall.

“He was a U.S. Army Specialist. He was with the military police. He was killed by an IED [improvised explosive device] while on patrol. It was Thanksgiving Day.” As I struggle to hold back tears, I look at her to see that, while misty-eyed, she is holding herself together better than I am. She continues holding up photos of him, “He had just turned 21.” A tear rolls down my cheek. And then, she hugs me. She lost her son, and *she* is comforting *me*.

“I’m sorry.” I suck it up and let her go. By this time, students are gathering around us wondering what is wrong. I ask if it is okay if I tell them who she is, and she agrees. I explain that she is the mother of one of the men on the wall. The kids are silent and wide-eyed. She takes it from there and tells them all about her baby boy. And then, she thanks the kids for creating the memorial. Even though these students are not the makers, you can sense the pride they feel in being a part of it.

Later, Della and I select one of his pictures and place it beside his name with a paper rose (Figure 43). She talks to another group of students who come out with their teacher. They are also silent and attentive, and many cry as well. She thanks them all for their thoughtfulness and applauds our effort. And she leaves. I cannot explain the feeling I have from that encounter. It makes me want to reach out to every mother of every child on that wall.



Figure 43. Della’s son.

As my mind returns back to the present, I watch as Helga’s students put up newly produced informational signs that they have designed. One series of signs is about the evolution of the national Memorial Day holiday and its meaning. Another series explains the various waves of conflict in which we have been engaged since the September 11th attacks in 2001.

They have also constructed pedestals honoring each of the five branches of the military, each bearing the branch flag, the customary downward turned rifle, topped with the branch helmet and based by boots.

As I walk down around and watch Helga and her students assembling the memorial, I get very emotional. I know that a small group of service-learning students, the R.A.Y.S. Council, has encouraged another group of students to think about community needs. The Civics students have gone through the process of investigating, planning, and preparing this Memorial Day display. These students have reached out to the community through a site visit and in collecting the materials needed for the branch memorials. As I stand there reflecting on how all this has come to be, I notice hundreds of laminated flags strung together between each pedestal. Upon closer inspection, I realize they are branch flags that have been colored, some neatly, others atrociously (Figure 44). I ask one of Helga's students about them and she says that each student wrote to their favorite elementary teacher and asked them if they would have their students color flags for a branch. Alas. Another layer of learning and serving. My dream come true.



Figure 44. Elementary schools participated in this year's display.

Epilogue

There are many disappointments in this year of classlessness. A major disappointment is Relay For Life. Without the class, there are no decorations for the campsite, no one to design and market a t-shirt, and no one to make the props for the many events throughout the night. Our school did not even set up the campsite. Our annual Kick Butt's Day event disappears, there are no Lupus Awareness month activities, and plans for Collegepalooza, an event to introduce rising freshman to community service, are rushed and haphazard. There is no time to organize for Global Youth Service Day. The greatest loss to me, however, is R.A.Y.S. Workshop. Over the past four years, the weekly opportunity to get students interested in service has been a great success. Yes, some did it to meet hour requirements, but there is at least a connection to community service. That, I feel, is the greatest loss.

The school year has now ended. I carefully scan the room to make sure everything is put away. Thank goodness I have an enormous closet in my room! It is crammed to the roof. Even my office chair, holding the old color printer, fits inside. The tables have been wiped down, the wonderful lemon scent of Lysol wipes hangs in the air. The television and computers are draped in plastic. I am ready for checkout.

A year without a service-learning class. But service-learning still happened. A great deal of it. We still have a R.A.Y.S. council, although the small group of students dwindled as the year progressed. The strong connections of the daily classroom encounters are just not there. I did most of the planning and tried to involve students as much as I could. I am tired and frustrated with the lack of progress in reinstating the course.

What would happen next year? I can just stop sponsoring R.A.Y.S. as an extracurricular. It is never a requirement. It is just something I dreamed up. And despite my intense belief that it

is important in our community, no one in administration or at the district office really cares if it comes back. I should just walk away.

But my wheels are already spinning. I cannot seem to help myself. I know I have one 7th grade Civics class next year and there is something freeing about having a singleton, especially a class that is about citizenship. I can already think of a dozen things we can do. Wait! I better meet the students first! They have to *want* to do it. They have to want to get involved.

It hits me then. I do not have a service-learning class next year. I may never have another service-learning class. Yet, I am still a service-learning teacher. I cannot help it. I think about what I have to teach through a service lens. I am a service-learning teacher. Class or no class, it is who I am. I cannot be a teacher without it. Full stop. No class required.

I take a deep breath. I laugh out loud. I teach through service because the purpose of education is to make our world a better place. Why teach if not to make the world a better place? Why teach students anything other than that which will make the world a better place? I serve, and I teach my students how to serve as well. And we both learn along the way. No class required.

CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTION THROUGH CONVERSATION

So I find myself here, at the computer once again. To my right, a Coke Vanilla Zero with the requisite straw, my License to Chill Tervis tumbler filled with room-temp water, and my Logitech mouse on my fluffy kitty mousepad. To my left, my spiral notebook, filled with thoughts, notes, quotes, fragments of conversations I've had with friends and family, author names, lists of self-imposed deadlines, and other random scribbles. It's 5:00 A.M., and I'm a little foggy; too much wine last night.

How do I do this? I turn back to my notes. Where did I write about analysis? There it is: see p. 83 Auto. I reach up on my shelf and find my slightly worn "holy book," *Autoethnography: Qualitative Research* by Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis. I quickly find p. 83 and flatten the book so it will stay open. It will almost lay flat, but I prop my box of tissues on the top edge just to make sure it will stay that way. Ah, there it is. "Because autoethnography is the study of culture through the lens of self, separating the content of the text from the form of its representation is not desirable or possible" (Adams, Holman Jones, & Ellis, 2015, p. 83). I am having a *crisis of representation*. According to Adams, Holman-Jones, and Ellis (2015), this crisis of representation calls into question "the goal of seeking a universal Truth" and "the possibility of making certain and stable knowledge claims about humans, experiences, relationships, and cultures" (p. 9). This crisis of representation also questioned other objectives and practices of mainstream social research, just reading the first two reminds me that I seek to find my truth. Autoethnographers value "narrative truth" (Denzin, 1989, p. 24), which my writing represents. This work is based on my story of experience and the stories of those friends

who have been with me along the way. The only measure is how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others as writers, participants, audiences, and humans (Bochner, 1994; Denzin, 1989).

So, how am I going to do this? I'm going to do what I tell my students to do. I'm going to go back to my prompt, in this case, my research questions. I'm going to take what I have learned about myself throughout this process, and I am going to answer my questions. As I reveal my narrative truth, I include those truths given to me by my friends. I also share the research literature that reinforces my truths. So, I begin.

What Does It Mean to be a Service-Learning Teacher?

As I meet and talk with each of my critical friends, I ask this question directly. Since this question first arises following my pivotal encounter with Kay, I begin with her response. I ask her about that long-ago conversation during which she asked if I would take a year off and just be a regular teacher. She remembers it. "So how am I not a regular teacher?" I ask. "What makes a service-learning teacher different? What does it mean to be a service-learning teacher?"

It's Not a Job

Kay thinks for a minute and then replies, "I think you are motivated to do it because you care about the bigger picture. You have a passion for kids to give back to their community. I think that's the driving force behind your role as a service-learning teacher."

"What do you mean by the bigger picture?" I ask.

"You see beyond the four walls of the school," Kay says,

"And, I think this is more than just a job for you. You are willing to give well beyond a regular workday."

She pauses for a moment and then continues. "It's not really a job that you can get done within the course of a day, and you are willing to do it anyway. You do things on weekends, after school, and over the summer."

Kay is right. I am willing to go beyond a regular workday, and I don't feel that what I am doing is work. It is just what I do. Upon reflection, this is not necessarily tied to service-learning. It is how I am with anything; as a child with a school project, in college as the Activities Director, as a teacher before service-learning. If there is reason to do something, stay on it until it is done. If it means extra time, so be it.

When I ask George to stop by and see me over his recent break from college, he gladly does so. We look back through the images of the Memorial Day display and talk about what it means to him. I ask him how he sees my role as a service-learning teacher as different from regular teachers.

He laughs and says, "Well, first, there needs to be a willingness to do work way past the time the bell rings."

George says, "This isn't about a paycheck to you. You are a teacher because you love helping kids and inspiring them to do things." George recognizes that being a teacher in service-learning takes a lot of work and dedication. "You need to love what you're doing. You can't just like it. It requires a lot of time, energy and a support system of other teachers, administration, and your family." According to Krebs's (2008) study of teachers who use service-learning as an instructional strategy, service-learning is extra work. "It's extra time; it's extra work. It's extra effort" (p. 126).

Empathy to the Nth degree

I continue asking this question as I talk with all of my friends and colleagues, and even family members. When I ask Tony, he replies without skipping a beat, “Empathy for your fellow man on steroids.”

He remembers when I came back early from abdominal surgery and when I came to school despite my smashed-in teeth following the bike accident. “The level of engagement and time you put into this terrifies me, and that dedication bleeds to your kids.” He adds, “You’re the kind of person that would make your dad stop the car in the middle of an interstate to help the turtle cross the road.”

I told him it was my husband, by the way, not my father.

I think about the emotional impact of Patriot Day, as students are learning about the individuals that died on 9/11. By researching and writing a biography about one or two individuals, our students build a capacity for empathy and begin to experience compassion. Teaching the history of that event without helping students make that connection will not do.

I realize, as a teacher, I am very empathic and compassionate, when necessary, towards the needs of my students and the community as a whole, and I feel emotionally suited to address those needs. But does that matter? Emotional self-efficacy, according to Goroshit & Hen (2014), refers to people's judgment regarding their own capacity to process emotional information accurately and effectively. Empathic teachers tend to create a safe and encouraging learning environment, and to foster positive relations with their students (Cooper, 2010; Goroshit & Hen, 2014). Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are also found to be associated with a wide range of teaching and learning motivations and contributions to students' performance and achievements (Thoonen, Slegers, Peetsma, & Oort, 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007;

Goroshit & Hen, 2014). My empathy transcends the classroom and extends to all facets of community.

Care and Moral Development

I also want my students to recognize that they belong to something larger than themselves and our school. They are members of a community, and they have moral, civic, and social responsibilities to fulfill. I have a strong understanding of the importance of community in the educational process and a willingness to engage the community for the benefit of all stakeholders. The ethic of care has been introduced as a feminist perspective on moral education (Noddings, 1984, 1989, 1992, 2002a). The ethic of care speaks of an obligation to do something, not out of duty or righteousness, but out of “a sense that ‘I must’ do something arises when people address us” (Noddings, 2002b, p. 13). This sense of “I must” resonates with me strongly. Noddings (2002b) says that sometimes we respond because we want to or because we love the one who asks us, or just because it is the thing to do. With me, the I-must-do-something call is strong.

Helga thinks that I feel a sense of urgency with getting the kids involved in thinking about their role in the community, what is going on around them, and their education. She tells me, “Other teachers have standards that they have to teach, and, once they're done, they feel that they've met their goal. They check that off their list.” I am quite literally unable to identify with that because so much in adolescent development cannot be standardized. Helga points out that I have the compassion to go and track down what it is that kids are really interested in and what they want to do to make the class better, the school better, the community better. Helga says, “I think that goes back to being selfless. You're not there for yourself, you're there for them, and you don't put yourself first in all this.” To the contrary, I feel very selfish in regards to my

family and how much time I take from them in all of this. Is my community more important than my family?

Josie also spoke of my very strong sense of community, getting people involved and giving back. She tells me, “Some people just don't care. They want to do their job, and they want to leave, and they have no desire to get people involved. I mean, people say they want the community involvement, but they don't do it, where you do it, and don't just say it.” I cannot help it. It is the right thing to do.

When there is local reaction to world crisis, such as the earthquake in Haiti and the tsunami in Japan, I encourage response and guide student to follow through on efforts to support nations in their time of crisis. When Sandy Hook survivors called for snowflakes to decorate their temporary school after the tragedy, we have every student in our school learning techniques for cutting beautiful snowflakes and we sent over 3,000 of them in a show of love and support. This teaches our students moral responsibility.

I ask Grace, Bonnie's mother, her thoughts on care and moral development. She replies:

I think everybody wants to make the world a better place in some way, and so, as a service-learning teacher, you have an opportunity to have groups of kids care about things in the community and other things outside of themselves. And since they're at a very egocentric age, I think it's good for them.

My husband is always telling me that I cannot save the world, and I know this. But I do feel that we all have the capacity to make the world a better place and I want my students to know this as well. Participating, hands-on, with the recycling program gave many students a glimpse of how it feels to help make the world a better place. Young adolescents need the

movement, the action, and the socialization involved with these types of activities, but they also need a teacher who is willing to take them out of a classroom to do it.

Noddings says that we remain at least partially responsible for the moral development of each person we meet. “How I treat you may bring out the best or worst in you. How you behave may provide a model for me to grow and become better than I am” (2002b, p. 15). According to Noddings, the components of moral education include modeling moral behavior, facilitating open-ended dialogue, giving opportunities for practice, and confirming behaviors that are ethical and unethical (Noddings, 2002b). Teachers who implement service-learning believe that caring and making a difference in the world can be purposefully taught, both to students in their classrooms and to their colleagues next door or across the country (Krebs, 2008).

Grace helps me to see how my care for community impacts my students. She believes, as a service-learning teacher, I have a unique skill: “You know and understand how to make kids see community.”

I reflect back on Russ’s comments about my desire to do the Patriot Day memorial year after year. I want to make my students feel like they are a part of the community history, and 9/11 is a big part of that history. It can also be the catalyst for further moral development as we strive to bring hope and unity back to our world.

Teaching with Purpose

When I begin my conversation with Joan, I let her know that when I first arrive in Florida, I see a news story about her students’ efforts to protect Sand Hill cranes by placing warning signs for motorists that often sped down the streets leading to the school. Joan recalls, “Oh, I remember the look on my students’ face. A little boy, when he realizes that his idea to protect those cranes has come to fruition, he knows he has made a difference.”

As we talk, we recognize that this is a common thread in our work. Joan and I talk about the power of our students' faces when they "light up with the desire to help others." She agrees that these moments are what fuels her passion to be a service-learning teacher. "You have to be willing to give the time," according to Joan, "and that requires the passion for seeing students realize what they have accomplished for the benefit of others." The perceived purpose of doing something is hypothesized to be a primary factor in determining the individual's level and quality of engagement (Anderman & Maehr, 1994).

Dee Dee takes over Joan's class upon her retirement. She presents a very unique perspective, that of a teacher who willingly walks into a service-learning classroom and takes over where another leaves off. I am very interested in knowing what attracted her to take the position. She is one of the recipients of Joan's mini-grants and that opened the door to service-learning in her graphic design courses. Once she experienced the power of service-learning, she welcomed the challenge of becoming the service-learning teacher. When I asked Dee Dee what it means to be a service-learning teacher, she says,

"I guess you can compare us to missionaries." I recall her telling me that she is the daughter of a missionary. "It probably takes a lot of the same kind of stuff. They go anywhere and do what they do anywhere with what they have."

Bonnie reminds me that my focus is always a little different. "I feel like [your focus] is not just purely academic. It's combining the service and the learning both together which offers a whole different kind of learning. It's where your heart is." Service-learning brings purpose to learning.

All About Students

As I talk with Joan and Dee Dee, we learn we are similar in many ways. We all consider ourselves to be outside-the-box thinkers and promote that way of thinking to our students. We are intuitive individuals, very imaginative, open-minded, and curious. We like novelty, we are curious, and we allow our students to explore their own curiosities.

Dee Dee continues. “You have to be willing to share. We are definitely over-achievers, but for the sake of others, not ourselves. I think we are very flexible and open to teaching in varying environments, having junk, and donations all around. It can't bother you. You have to be comfortable with chaos, because the projects can look chaotic in the beginning, but by the end it's really good.”

Josie calls my classroom “organized chaos.” Grace says, “your room stresses me out”. My room is usually a disaster; weekly craft projects for workshop clutter the back counter, Relay For Life characters in the corners and on the shelves, boxes of Patriot Day markers in the corner. Many of our projects create a mess. But this leads me to how open we are to student-driven innovation.

“You couldn't say no to anything,” Bonnie said. “You would always say yes, you know, and I think that opened opportunities for us as students because you said, ‘okay guys, this is what we have, so let's come up with something great to do.’ I thought that is awesome.”

Barbara is my intern for a semester. She witnessed my class in action and says, “I mean I think you are the type of person that is more likely to lead by example, and I think that they are watching you and studying under you.”

Talking with Barbara, who saw the ins and outs of the class on a daily basis, is a revealing experience. It is clear that the service-learning class period is very different from my

other class periods. She says, “You inspire a passion in students for wanting to be active and wanting to be the best student they can be, and I feel your beliefs in what you are doing and what you are teaching really translate through your expectations of students.”

“I feel like you have a different mindset.” Bonnie shared. “You didn't treat us like kids. It isn't just like babysitting, you know, whereas some teachers in education tend to take that viewpoint.” Bonnie felt that the class gave them a chance to be independent and do fun things on their own without their parents. This is an interesting and eye-opening statement for me. Is this a positive thing?

When I talk to Marie, mother of four former R.A.Y.S., I seek to learn more about how my students perceive me as a teacher. Marie says straight away:

They love you. You're a mom to them. You're a teacher, but you just treat them like your own kids. You respect them; you don't belittle them. You lift them up, you give them responsibility, and I think these days we baby so many kids. They get excited when you give them that responsibility, and they don't want to disappoint you. That's what I found with my kids.

The first part of this statement makes me feel good but also guilty. Do my own children feel this way? The last part brought me back to Zack's earlier comments about letting him find his own way and how it made him stronger.

As George and I finish one day, he asks if he can make an observation about me. He says it relates to how I deal with my students. I am a little afraid to hear what he has to say. He says, “I think you take all failure to yourself; but when people succeed, it's on them. So you will take a person's failure or a student's failure and apply it to yourself; but when we do something, all the

glory goes to us more or less. You'll say this project is theirs, not that this project is theirs and mine.”

I told him that the key to success has to be the students. Otherwise, why do this? There have been numerous times when it would be so simple to just complete a task on my own, but what would anyone learn from it. If students play any role in completing a project, they are a part of something bigger and they belong. It is important for me to let them see what they accomplished. What is failure anyway? We just figured out another way not to do something, and we try again.

A final question still lurks in my mind. Why do I do this? Why not try and be a regular teacher? The final theme relates to motivation: Our motivation comes from feeling there is a deeper and more profound purpose to the learning that is going on in our classroom. Our job makes us feel valued.

Uniquely Motivated

I asked Helga what she perceives as my motivation to be a service-learning teacher. I've often worried that deep down my motivation is to receive attention, so I asked Helga if she thought that might be it. She quite simply said, “No, I don't think it is.” She goes on concerning motivation:

I don't think it's about anything *for* you; you don't *get* anything out of this. You don't get a pay increase for it; you don't get an award for it; you do this because of the excitement you see with the students allowing them to feel that they can make a change or have an impact and learn something at the same time.

Helga believes I am fueled by seeing my students get excited even over the small things. She says it “fills my tank”, more than them getting an A on a test. She adds, “The former students

who visit your classroom just to say hello, seeing those kids come back still to you. I think all those little things fuel you.”

Helga asked me, “How does it make you feel when you look at what started as a recycling program, look at what it is today; how does that make you feel? Do you feel valued?” I reply that it makes me feel great. At the end of a day, I forget about the fact that I have to do in-school field trip permission forms for every kid, coordinate all the teachers, write-up lessons, make sure the kids write a script, design the shirts, and all that. It might be an exhausting day, but it just makes me feel awesome. I tell her as much.

Helga asked me, “Does that fuel you for another project?”

I say, “Oh yes, yes.”

When I asked Josie for her thoughts on my motivations, Josie’s her comments really hit home.

“I think you put yourself out there a lot for everyone. Do you know what I mean?”

I think I understand her meaning. It is often that “I must” feeling.

Josie continues, “I think that’s part of who you are as a person.” And that is why we are here, I remind her.

She says, “Like, I teach; I leave it at school. When my kids are done with civics, they’re done with civics. They move on, that’s it.”

Josie reminds me, “In your class, they’re never done. You know you’ve got kids coming back to you from high school five years later. I think it defines a lot about you.”

I think about the email folder I have labeled X-Rays through which I stay connected to students who are interested in staying in touch. I think about the students who come back to the middle school to help with service projects even though they are in high school, even college.

Josie closes with, “I think you don't walk away from this because that's just who you are. That's why you can't walk away. It'd be like walking away from yourself, which you can't ever do. Walking away from teaching, that's a whole other story.”

When I introduce myself as a service-learning teacher, I will typically get a, “What’s that?” I will then explain how, in my class, students learn academic benchmarks by doing meaningful service activities to meet real community needs. That is what we do. That explains the classroom. Now, I am closer to explaining the teacher.

Cruickshank, Bainer, and Metcalf (1999) hold that a motivating personality influences student learning. Enthusiasm, variety, warmth, and humor are all characteristic of the motivating teacher. Kay says I have a charismatic personality and it enables me to “sell” service-learning to my students and to other teachers. Other attributes include an orientation toward success and a professional demeanor, which means the teacher is focused on helping students learn. I believe my all-in attitude spills over to my service-learning students; actually, all of my students. During our MLK Day clean-ups, they saw me bending and stooping to crawl through the shrubs to clean out debris. During R.A.Y.S. Workshop, students saw me cutting, gluing, taping, painting, but they also heard me talking about how the faces of the residents at Patty’s House would light up when they saw our work.

A middle grades service-learning course teacher is: a highly empathetic, compassionate, and caring person who is steeped in the understanding of the importance of relational care and moral education; an educator that supports social-emotional learning and provides opportunities for civic engagement, growth-oriented and flexible with dynamic personalities, willing to share resources and work well beyond normal expectations of the job; a true fan of the nature of the middle level child, trusting and encouraging unique ways of solving problems and always willing

to go outside the box; motivated by teaching with a purpose and feeling valued after the work is done.

I am sure most teachers have bits and pieces of the above, but a service-learning teacher must be all of that.

What Experiences Shape the Personal and Professional Development of a Middle School Service-Learning Course Teacher?

Personal experiences vary but seem to be immersed in caring relationships with family and community. One must have a great capacity for making caring connections and a concern for moral integrity for self and others. Professional development is guided by self-authorship and a propensity toward creativity in educating children.

Cared For

I have always felt the love and care of my family and friends, and even my community. Despite a divorce, my parents have always been beyond civil with one another in an effort to maintain family, and I always felt loved and cared for by both of them, even if they didn't say it all of the time. I am very fortunate. My role in sorority and my work in parks and recreation helped me grow a sense of community and how it is important. Becoming a teacher has only strengthened that realization. Joan says she wanted to be a teacher from a young age and wanted to help others learn to grow. "I used to organize plays for our neighborhood. It made me feel connected to my community." Dee Dee grew up as the daughter of a missionary, traveling the world, helping others in need. She fell into teaching through her graphic arts work.

While all of our experiences differ, we all have experienced love, care, and community. We have experienced being cared for and now are comfortable in our respective missions to be the carer.

Creativity

Joan has her theater, and Dee Dee has her graphic design. I, on the other hand, have come in the back way, developing my creative experiences along the way through service-learning. I helped students paint a pathway to class, built a pirate ship to fight cancer, and helped students design a giant American flag in honor of Patriot Day. This desire for creativity impacts our teaching in various ways. While K-12 educational experiences might differ, it would seem that service-learning teachers have chosen four-walled classrooms in traditional institutions of learning, at least as a home base, because those are our experiences growing up. But we tend to move beyond those four walls in our teaching. Support for creative expression seems to be a common denominator. Authentic assessment and real-world applications are a natural fit.

We share the same desire as most middle school teachers possess to help students learn and grow but are motivated more by real world application of knowledge than by standardized forms of assessment. Those educators who have experience with authentic assessment, experiential learning, and/or a background related to community service might lean toward taking on the role of the service-learning teacher. Professional experiences also vary. There is no one way to become a middle grade service-learning teacher. A service-learning teacher is typically an experienced educator who may not be formally trained in, but understands, the development of young adolescents and supports creative expression.

Self-Authored

Middle school service-learning course teachers develop; they are not trained as such—at least not at this time. They develop from various creative and flexible backgrounds, personal experiences, and structured education. My story is unique as are the stories of others. We have all authored ourselves to be the educators and community leaders that we are. We have created a

personal ideology, an internal identity, and make our own meanings of values, beliefs, generalities, principles, concepts, relational loyalties, and intrapersonal situations.

Self-authorship is a theory about the manner in which people derive meaning from their experiences (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2009; Creamer & Laughlin, 2005; Kegan, 1994; King & Baxter Magolda, 1996; Meszaros, 2007; Pizzolato, 2005). This theory "integrates the epistemological, intrapersonal and interpersonal development to conceptualize the way people interpret and analyze what happens to them and draw conclusions about what experiences mean to them" (Creamer & Laughlin, 2005, p. 16). Kegan (1994) coined the term self-authorship in describing a shift of meaning-making capacity from outside the self to inside the self. According to Kegan, it represents an ideology, an internal identity, a self-authorship that can coordinate, integrate, act upon, or invent meanings, and achieve a personal authority.

My path to service-learning is full of curves. I came out of college headed for parks and recreation and landed in a high school social studies classroom (actually, a portable). I stumbled across and teaching strategy that is creative and engaging for my students, and I dug in. After 15 years of teaching, I find myself teaching a middle school service-learning class.

Joan followed a traditional route for her teacher's education. As a drama teacher, she began doing service-learning with her students who created and performed skits about bullying. The service-learning grant funds she acquired helped with props and costumes and, eventually, allowed travel to other schools. After a number of years, her program expanded and led her to a service-learning class.



Figure 45. Joan invited us to visit her school in 2009.

Using the federal Learn & Serve grant, Joan (Figure 45) is able to offer mini-grants to other teachers at her school. Dee Dee is a graphics arts teacher who applied for the mini-grants to get supplies for class projects. Joan taught Dee Dee how to guide her students to create service-related projects.

Dee Dee said, “My class took on the local animal shelter and did graphic art projects telling the school about how to support the agency. It is a very tiny step.” Joan also organized an advisory board and asked Dee Dee to serve on it. When Joan announced her retirement, she asked Dee Dee to take over the class and the advisory board. Dee Dee says she is honored.

Formalized education in middle grades education is not a requirement. I have none. Dee Dee says she chose middle school because she felt she could have a greater impact than at the high school level. She says, “I can get into the heart of a 12-, 13-, or 14-year-old. I don't know if I can get into the heart of a 15-, 16-, or 17- year old. The older they get, the tougher they get.”

She taught at the high school for two years and saw the tough, serious stuff, and felt that their hearts have hardened.

Marie believes my role as a social studies teacher is relative to my interest in service-learning. “You're a social studies teacher, and you know what a good citizen does, being a part of your community.” I believe being a social studies teacher allows me more flexibility with curriculum, but I also see service-learning as a fit for other core and elective subjects, especially at the middle level.

I believe that the we are all uniquely authored as teachers, that we have developed our personal systems of knowledge and beliefs based on our experiences and apply them through a service lens. We see need and we ask ourselves how best to address it. If the mold doesn't fit, we reshape the mold.

The personal and professional experiences that lend to the development of a middle grades service-learning teacher vary greatly; however, they share common elements: experience with caring relationships, involvement and experience with family and/or community; proclivity for creative expression; a self-authored educator with a true interest in teaching young adolescents. To truly understand the middle school service-learning teacher, we need to look at the fruits of the labor. I turn next to the question of the impact a service-learning teacher has on student learning.

What Learning Occurs in the Service-Learning Classroom?

I ask Tony what he thinks kids learned in service-learning. Tony said, “Something they are not learning in any other class: not to think about themselves, but to think about others; identify the problems of others as opposed to their own, such as a broken screen on their iPhone.” We both laughed. First-world problems abound at our school. In the service-learning

class, students are learning to think more deeply about the world around them and the problems that are present as well as possible solutions. Explicating everything they learn in the class is a challenge, especially as it is all quite intertwined. There is also the potential for a child to not engage, and therefore not learn. As with most things in life, you get out of it what you put into it.

Bonnie tells me that you can't force passion, and service-learning takes passion:

If I didn't find a cause I was passionate about, I wouldn't have been so engaged. I think you also need passion for your classmates as well. Because even the projects that aren't mine, when it gets down to the last thing, we're all chipping in and we're all helping, because, you know, that's important for that person, our classmate we care about.

The service-learning classroom has many opportunities for personal growth including knowledge of self and others, how to treat and work with others, and how to learn to learn, and love it.

Moral Education and Self-Understanding

Moral and civic development are products of quality service-learning. Students in a middle school service-learning class learn to care about and, possibly, for something larger than themselves and those in their personal bubble. They learn about empathy, compassion, tolerance; but, more importantly, they learn they have the power to address the compelling needs that trigger those emotions. Students learn that their work can make a difference.

George recalls seeing the mother who visited the Memorial Day project. He says he realized then that his work has an impact on others. "I don't think that would happen in a normal classroom," he says. "I learned that I can make a difference. I don't think I'd learn that in a normal classroom because there isn't the opportunity to really make a difference per say."

As Bonnie flipped through our scrapbooks and binders, she suddenly sat up straight and held the binder open in my direction. She says with excitement, “I made this. I remember making that flyer!”

I have to tell her that her project, A Kid’s Place Clothing Drive, is one of the programs that is impacted by the loss of the class. She expresses sadness that such an important project might not happen. I promise her that we are working on finding a way to make it happen.

She tells me, “I think this class shaped me in so many different ways; whereas the traditional classroom would have, you know, less of an impact. I learned about the needs of foster children through this class.” She has taken her new knowledge and planned a clothing drive and a field day for the children at the local foster home.

Students engaged in service-learning demonstrate increased understanding of community needs (Melchior, 1999). Joan adds, “They learn what it feels to make a difference, to make an impact on the world around them.” They also may have the opportunity to have that care reciprocated. That is a key measure for quality service-learning. Students who engaged in service-learning are more likely to treat one another kindly, help one another, and care about doing their best (Billig, 2000). Noddings believes that the “main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving and lovable people” (Coleman, Depp, and O’Rourke, 2011, Para. 2).

When I first applied for the federal grant, I have to identify a compelling need in our own community. Our free and reduced lunch rate is the lowest in the district. Our attendance rate is the highest. What are our needs? I then realized that our needs are not material, but related to moral development. That year, we have seen a number of instances of bullying.

Dee Dee says her school is very similar. “We believed from the beginning that this is an anti-bullying campaign. If you don't want kids to bully, they need to care more.” They looked to building a program that would promote caring connections between peers and within the community. “It teaches them to be less selfish and care more about their community,” Dee Dee says of the class. She shares how the attitude shifts over time:

When the kids apply to be in this class, most of them apply because we go on field trips, which is selfish. But once they're at a place like Metropolitan Ministries and they're filling the hygiene bags and they're actually working, they start to care. The place might smell and be moldy, but the kids don't say anything about it. They care that 1,000 people a month have a hygiene bag. You get them to go from selfish play to care and help 1,000 people a month.

Students engaged in service-learning demonstrate increased understanding cultural and racial diversity issues (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Theriot, 2006). Both of our schools needed to expose our students to real needs in the world. Kay says, “it gets our students out of their little shell of entitlement.”

The very first year we offer the class at Randall, we schedule a field trip to visit Joan's middle school service-learning class in a nearby district. Her students show us their classroom and explain their daily procedures. Her students prepared each of my students a colorful folder with samples of flyers and brochures they have produced and even a DVD with service-learning clip art and quotes. We are overwhelmed with their offers of support. A few months after our visit, we receive a check in the mail from the school. The students decided to raise money for our class to help us with supplies. My students are amazed and moved by their generosity. It

taught them about their own responsibility to others. They knew now that they have to pay it forward.

George also believes that these opportunities expand students' self-understanding. He says that service-learning is a highly inclusive practice:

It's something, no matter your intelligence, you can do. It doesn't matter if you're an honor student, a regular student, you're Albert Einstein or way beneath; you can do this. It's open to everyone. You just need the motivation to actually do it.

The inclusive nature of service-learning helps my students expand their understanding of the world around them and begins to break down notions they may hold regarding those that are different than they are. Service-learning has a positive effect on students' interpersonal development and the ability to relate to culturally diverse groups (Billig, 2000). Moreover, if students have the opportunity to interact with people from a different background in an appropriately structured environment, prejudice and stereotypes can be reduced (Morgan & Streb, 2001). Getting the students involved with projects outside of our school allowed them to engage others that lived different lives, broadening perspectives on race, class, and ethnicity. Billig (2011) believes schools are considered to be the appropriate social institution to accomplish those goals not only because they are the only institutions that have the capacity and mandate to reach virtually every young person but also because they are a key contributor to the development of social norms.

Real World Experiences and 21st Century Skills

Today's adolescents learn in ways that are very different than I experienced. Technology has knocked down the walls of the classroom. Students will explore beyond with or without our guidance. Service-learning extends the classroom to the community, where young adolescents

apply their knowledge in a safe, collaborative, developmentally responsive environment (Fertman, White, & White, 2002; Leming, 2001; Pate, 2005; Scales & Blyth, 1997; Schine, 1997). Joan adds, “The class is real-world learning. They learn communication, technology, planning and organization skills, and ‘soft skills’ as they learn to deal with varying kinds of people.”

The service-learning course description utilizes Deweyan concepts of continuity, i.e., building on preceding home and community experiences of the child, and interaction of the internal thinking and inquisitiveness of the students with the external environment surrounding them (Hepburn, 1997). Service-learning brings together experiences of both rights and responsibilities, a connection that is essential to civic education and democratic communities. Experiential education also develops in students a concrete and practical awareness of the concepts of civic duty, public interest, and public good (Hepburn, 1997).

Dewey’s philosophy spoke to the importance of teaching students to apply what they learned to real world problems. He also saw the social studies, not as separate lines of study, but as the mechanisms to give direction and organization to all branches of study:

Young people who have been trained in all subjects to look for social bearings will also be educated to see the causes of present evils. They will be equipped from the sheer force of what they have learned to see new possibilities and the means of realizing them. They will be indoctrinated in its deeper sense without having had doctrines forced on them. (Dewey, 1938, p. x)

Helga saw that by my having students’ problem solve in the community, in our school, or even in the class, it’s developing a different type of student. The students are learning about team work and compromise.

Barbara notes that she saw a lot of cooperative learning. Students are working together trying to figure out things, with some guidance from me, but they are allowed to think through problems on their own. Barbara says her perception of a typical teacher is that “they go in, they do a lecture, and they grade papers and that's it.” She never saw that in my class.

George says that he felt our objective is always to do something productive which he hopes simulates the real world. Despite the arguing that often occurred amongst group members, he felt that our class groups worked harder to achieve goals because they had purpose. “It is about leadership and teamwork, something you couldn't learn in a regular class. It is character-building. You are discovering who you are.”

Parents see their students become advocates for change through enhanced communication and technology skills. Grace talks about Bonnie as a student in service-learning:

In middle school, at that young age, she is speaking to classes and getting kids involved in activities, leadership games, team work. That's just always a good skill for life no matter what you do. I am glad that she had the opportunity to get involved in that and that she's the type of person that can do that. I think it'll help her in the future.

Students are encouraged to develop their own understanding in my classroom so knowledge is personally useful to them. However, the fact that students are expected to construct their own understanding does not mean that all understandings are equally valid. While I believe that knowledge is subject to interpretation, I also believe that some conclusions are better than others. Students need to understand how to gather and evaluate evidence so they can distinguish good from poor arguments. I can teach them some of these skills, but some they will have to learn by working with other students or on their own. I believe that each student

will bring a unique and valuable perspective with them. I try to structure my class so that students will pool their resources and come to the best understanding possible.

As the committees in my class met to explore community needs and possible solutions, I encouraged them to dig deeper and work together to fully understand the complexities of the issues at hand. As they discussed Relay For Life themes, they tended to get caught up in the decorations and forget about the true reason for our work. I have to remind them that the argument for our use of class time on such an endeavor revolved around cancer awareness and finding a cure. I also helped guide them to make a plan to sell their ideas to stakeholders and potential partners.

Life-Long Learners

Tony says he has often heard students discussing what they will be doing in my class later that day. He says it is always with a sense of urgency, “These kids aren’t worried about whether they would finish an essay. They are worried about finishing the care packages for the soldiers because the consequences are real to them. They are 100% engaged.”

George learned a great deal about history as he planned the veterans Day and Memorial Day events, but, beyond that, he says he learned how to research independently. He created his own benchmarks, more or less, because it is his project. So it is what he deemed worthy.

Marie tells me that her son is stressed several times, but she says it is “a good stress.” I charged him with creating a new website. He has to learn how to create a website on his own. When he finished it and shares it with me, I can feel the pride he exudes and he has something tangible to show for it.

Dewey’s theory of experiential learning, or instrumentalism, has been directly connected to the origin of service-learning and has reinforced my personal teacher beliefs about educating

middle school service-learners. Learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection, which may occur through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and drawing, among other activities (Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2001; Kolb, 1984). New information, however, must be presented in a way that allows the student to relate the information to prior experiences; thus, deepening the connection with this new knowledge. This is the key to student engagement.

Students are more engaged and are self-motivated life-long learners. They learn to strive for quality work and set high expectations for themselves. Students say they gain leadership and project planning skills that are directly beneficial to them in secondary and post-secondary education. Teachers note improved social and academic responsibility.

George said, “I learned more things in service-learning that I’ve used in college than things I learned in regular classes, like English. Identifying theses is not useful to me anymore but service-learning, it’s useful to everyone.”

Leadership and Responsibility

Tony recounted his memories of a former student saying that, on the first day of seventh grade, he thought how scared he would be if he saw the kid fixing his hamburger at McDonalds one day. Tony worried he didn’t know which end is up. That young man ended up in my service-learning class, and the transformation he saw when the young man came into his room the next year as a Great American Teach-In presenter is amazing. He is a leader and he is comfortable in his shoes.

George felt the class gave everyone an opportunity to learn when to be a leader, a follower, and how you work best in groups or by yourself. “You had to come to a consensus in this class,” he says. “So you learn how to compromise, which is actually a big thing.”

Bonnie feels she grew into her role as a leader through service-learning. “I went from sixth grade not doing anything to then eighth grade being the president of the whole thing. So it really shaped me in that way, and that plays into every aspect of my life now.”

Bonnie says she feels that all those little projects just built up to something very different from other classes: teaching leadership, how to take initiative, duty and responsibility. “As young leaders, you taught us how to go through the entire planning process for our projects, create a supply list, you know, all of that. And so now I'm more equipped for everything.”

Bonnie points out another beneficial lesson she learned: What to do when things don't work out. She recalls getting things approved for a Christmas project. It took forever, but it was part of the learning experience. “You can't always count on things working out.”

Kay notes how important student responsibility is in the classroom. “The student is the one who's gonna have to drive the project. So it's going to entail independent research on their topic, finding community resources, how to get the funds for the project, how to interact with business partners and other adults, and they have to be able to sell what they want to do.” She says she is always impressed with how these young people achieve so much.

As I close this section, I tried to find the best narrative truth I could to support these findings. I turn to Marie since all four of her children have experienced the class in some fashion. I asked Marie what she saw her kids learn:

You gave my kids leadership roles and responsibility. You taught them about building a relationship with community members. You taught them to be reflexive thinkers and problem solvers. They learned organization, technology, collaboration, teamwork, and especially how to make and keep a deadline. And, what would you call it? I know you

would throw stuff out there and say okay you come up with some ideas. They'd come up with the idea and then start making phone calls.

I told her I called that Investigation. She continued. "And that is very scary, and they have no idea what to do, but they did it. I remember my son writing letters."

I reply, "I'd like to say I tried to teach him some writing skills." She added:

You also taught them about public speaking. They got to travel to meet with government officials, and that is a confidence builder. And maybe school pride, knowing that they're out there passing all of this on, as an ambassador of service-learning. And they are exhausted sometimes, but they are making videos and such. It is a good exhaustion.

I pointed to a binder, and said, "Your daughter went through this whole book for me. It was her job to go through and change and update things, to make suggestions. I am still using that binder."

Marie sums it up, "and a purpose for learning."

CHAPTER SIX: DEMONSTRATION

I am a service-learning teacher. I do not have a classroom dedicated only to service-learning any longer, but I am still a service-learning teacher. I am different from others in that I view middle school education through a service-learning lens. What is a genuine need in the community and what am I teaching that connects to that need? My community can be defined in many ways; my classroom, my fellow teachers, my school, my neighbors, the major metropolitan center thirty miles away, all of humanity, in fact the planet Earth. The need speaks and I look for the connection in my curriculum. It is there. Otherwise, what is the purpose of learning? I am willing to take the time and make the connection so students will see that learning has purpose and they can bring about positive change with their new-found knowledge and personal effort. I may not have a class, but I can still teach students how to learn and serve.

Overview of the Problem and the Purpose

In 2009, a youth service-learning council I started in 2007 with Learn & Serve funds evolves into a service-learning class. Through this class, my students learn about service-learning and then carry the strategy into multiple classrooms in our school and into the community. The twenty-plus service-learners on the class roster are able to engage our student body and the surrounding community in volunteer, community service, and service-learning activities. When the funding ends in June 2011, the class survive on the remaining materials, local fundraisers, small donations and grants as well as the support of the school administration and the district. We are able to continue with a course code, a classroom, and a teacher until the district cancels the class after the 2014-15 school year.

This study, based on a personal desire to understand my professional self and the learning outcomes of my efforts, is now also about understanding my role after the loss of the course. Understanding what it means to be a middle school service-learning teacher as well as explicating the learning that occurs in a service-learning classroom will assist as I make the case for reinstatement of the course. It can also support others in the effort to create such classrooms. There is a distinct gap in the research in regards to those who teach a class based on service-learning, but also about people who self-identify as service-learning teachers.

My study is about the lived experiences of a teacher leading a middle grades course framed around service-learning. I seek to identify the unique qualities, characteristics, and essences of a service-learning teacher to demarcate any distinctive similarities or differences from what my principal identified as a “normal” teacher. I share my personal and professional experiences that may have contributed to my development as a middle school service-learning teacher and especially the events over the years of the course. I seek to discover what drives me to see the world through a service-learning lens. Lastly, I want to identify and explain what I witnessed happening in my classroom so that I can more clearly define the learning conditions, be they social, emotional, ethical, or purely academic, so that educational leaders can begin to understand the value of a service-learning course for the students in the classroom as well as the school and surrounding community.

I hope my story will inform other educators about what a service-learning as a middle-grade course of study looks and feels like. My narrative presents a classroom dedicated to developing young adolescents into community and civic leaders. In sharing my lived experiences as a service-learning classroom teacher in a detailed and evocative narrative, I hope

to educate curriculum gatekeepers, administrators, and teacher educators about the concept of service-learning as a pedagogical framework.

My Personal Interpretive Framework

Using Kelchtermans (1993) as my compass, I create an autobiographical narrative, with help from my critical friends, that enhances my self-understanding. I am able to view my personal and professional experiences in context and better understand my interpretations of various situations and subsequent actions. This process has helped me understand the connections I make between completing a successful service-learning project and my self-esteem, helping out an elderly person and my self-image, or organizing my classroom management system using democratic principles and my task perception (see Figure 46).

Furthermore, the process also assists me in defining my subjective educational theory, my knowledge and beliefs as a middle school service-learning teacher. I have a knowledge of history and the research ability to find the missing pieces. I know and understand young adolescents, their behaviors, abilities, and quirks, and I know how to care for them and show them the power of love. I believe that all children have value and will have an impact on this world. It is my belief, also, that I am responsible for my actions as they teach my students to be responsible for their actions. Thus, we are all responsible for one another. I believe every experience is an opportunity to learn and experience is how young adolescents learn best. By laying out what I have learned about myself, with help from my critical friends, in my personal interpretive framework, I have been able to capture major themes. These themes emerged in my personal narrative and in the conversations with others who have been present in my lived experiences. Based on these themes I have constructed overarching findings for my study on what it means to be a service-learning teacher, the personal and professional development of a

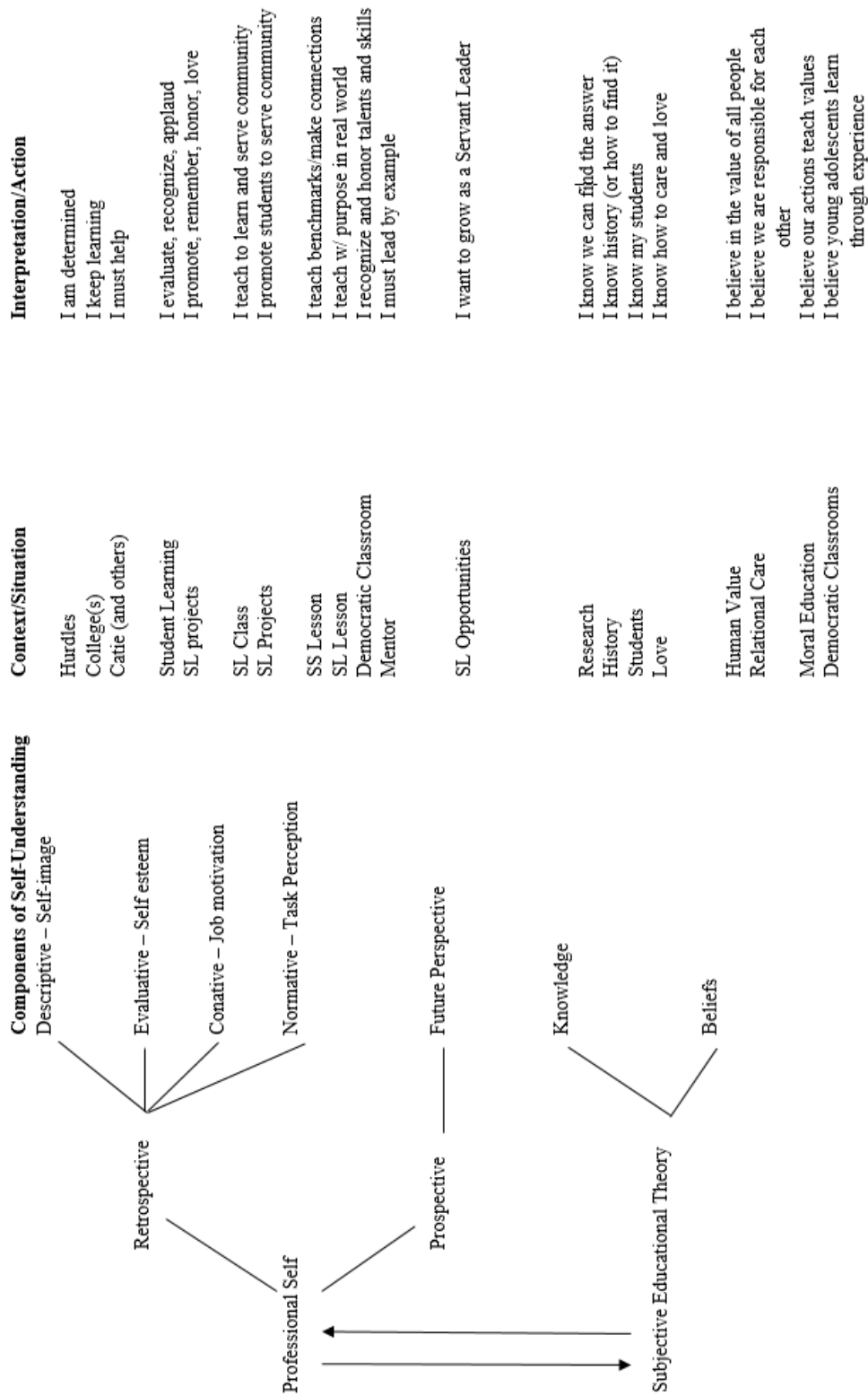


Figure 46. Components of the personal interpretive framework (Kelchtermans, 1993, p.448) with unique qualities of the service-learning teacher.

middle level service-learning teacher, and what students learn in a service-learning class.

Overarching Findings

In Chapter Five, I begin to structure responses to my three guiding questions just as I would tell my students do: I started writing answers and supporting them with the comments I received from my critical friends. After reading and rereading my personal narrative and conversations with critical friends, I make declarations about service-learning teachers regarding personal attributes, character traits, and unique qualities. I reveal my narrative truths. Here, I share my overarching findings.

These findings, also presented in summary in Table 4, represent my best and most concise response to any educator who should ask the over-arching question for this study, “What does it mean to be a service-learning teacher?” I signify educator here because a response for a non-educator would possibly require an explanation of what it means to be a teacher. My goal is to first, understand it myself, and then be able to use my findings to further the practice, promote the class concept, and woo those who hold the power in education to make this middle grades service-learning course a widespread reality. So, should an educator ask, what it means to be a service-learning course teacher, I would reply as follows.

An “I Must” Care Perspective

I cannot escape the feeling that “I must” do something. It is a deep, personal belief about the importance of making a positive difference in the world and teaching this belief to students. Noddings (2002b) says, “the closer we are to intimate needs of life, the more likely we are to understand its fragility and to feel the pangs of the inner ‘I must’ -stirring of the heart that moves us to respond to one another” (p. 20). Noddings believes schools should encourage students to

Table 4. Overarching Themes: What is a middle school service-learning teacher?

Themes	Supporting Research	Descriptions	My Life Episodes
Self-Authored	Kegan, 1994, Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2009, Mezirow, 2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal ideology and an internal identity • make my own meanings and trust my internal voice • my personal philosophy guides reactions to reality. • living my convictions is “as natural and as necessary as breathing” (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p.281). • proclivity for creative expression • believe that learning is life-long 	<i>Hurdles</i> <i>College</i> <i>Trash-To-Treasure Project</i> <i>Service-Learning Class</i> <i>PhD</i>
Committed to Community	Dewey, 1900; Sergiovanni, 1992, 1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connect community to the classroom • build community of kinship, place and mind • democratic classroom • consider real-world applications of knowledge • experiential learning and problem-based learning • structured reflection • provides opportunities for civic engagement 	<i>Parks and Recreation</i> <i>Relay For Life</i> <i>Patriot Day/Veterans Day/Memorial Day</i> <i>Great American Teach-In</i> <i>Service-Learning Challenge Week</i>
An “I Must” Perspective on Care	Noddings, 2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I Must” do something. • the importance of making a positive difference in the world (moral education) • teach students to be carers by caring leadership • “stirring of the heart that moves us to respond to one another” (Noddings, 2002, p. 20). • encourage students to work together (relational care) 	<i>Catie</i> <i>Motherhood</i> <i>various emergency care projects</i> <i>Patty’s House</i> <i>Classlessness</i>
Servant Leadership	Greenleaf, 1977; Sergiovanni, 1992, Bowman, 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an overarching purpose in the classroom... to perform meaningful service to meet genuine needs • Let those to be served define their own needs • Empower students to act on shared values • Encourage charity, consensus, and commitment in the classroom • Be outraged when empowerment is abused and when purposes are ignored 	<i>Service-Learning council</i> <i>Continuing community engagement</i> <i>Speak at Public Forum</i> <i>Write the course curriculum</i>

work together, to help one another, not just to improve academic performance, but to gain competence in caring. The service-learning classroom is the perfect laboratory for developing caring individuals.

Slattery and Rapp (2003), after Martin Buber, describe relational ethics as doing what is necessary to be “true to one’s character and responsible for one’s actions and their consequences on others” (p. 55). Central to relational ethics is the question “What should I do now?” rather than the statement “This is what you should do now” (Bergum, 1998). Helping others in need serves as my motivation in all things, and especially in my job. This represents both the conative and normative components of my personal interpretive framework. This “I must” feeling is both my motivation and how I perceive my task as a teacher. If I see need, I seek to find out the best way to help. Being a service-learning teacher in a service-learning classroom allows for me to share my “I must” moments with my students and explore ways to possibly meet needs. I have also found that my students can help me realize when my perception of need might be unrealistic. My “I must” mentality has led me to often spread myself too thin. When I get to that state, I am no good to anyone. I often end up worrying about meeting needs that are outside of my realm and impossible to meet. This need to care for others impacts my self-confidence and self-esteem when I am unable to provide the help to which I have committed myself. But providing the service is only one part of the caring cycle.

According to Noddings (2012), reciprocity and mutuality are important in relational ethics. Reciprocity of care is “the mutual recognition and appreciation of response” (Noddings, 2012, p.53). Noddings says the cared-for's response completes a caring relation, or episode, and the response often provides further information about his or her needs and interests, and how the carer might expand the caring relation. The response from the cared-for then provides building

blocks for the construction of a continuing caring relation. If the cared-for is unable to or unwilling to respond and complete the relation, the work of the carer becomes more and more difficult. Experiences in the service-learning classroom demonstrate the importance of reciprocity of care. I make sure my students understand that they cannot just give, but must receive service and care. If students just collect items for the homeless and donate them to a shelter, they have not gained anything from the service but have only solidified their perspectives on haves and have-nots. Also, when students take on a project and they do not gain any response from the recipient of the service, they lose motivation and interest. As the service-learning teacher, I also feel it when we complete a project that meets the needs of our students or community yet get no response from administration. Despite it, however, I continue feeling as if “I must”.

Despite the potential hazards of the “I must” perspective, I feel it is an essential part of being a service-learning course teacher. It serves as the driving force in looking for needs in the community and the tenacity required to identify possible solutions that can be connected to academic benchmarks. Without the “I must” attitude, a service-learning teacher might allow students to deem projects too challenging or difficult for their attention. The “I must” is the steam that will force the pistons to turn and keep the machine moving forward.

Teaching a classroom of service-learners is quite simply the right fit for the “I must” individual. The service-learning classroom is a welcoming place for democratic, student-centered instruction and experiential education, and a great home for an enthusiastic teacher who seeks to motivate others to do good things. My personal nature supports a tolerant and positive environment for students to openly discuss important issues and feel comfortable proposing possible solutions.

I have always told my students that every experience is a learning experience, even the bad ones. My last classroom rule: Learn something new every day. Often the knowledge gained by a student in a 50-minute class period is not the posted objective of the day. It might be that the pencil sharpener doesn't like colored pencils. It doesn't matter. It is new knowledge to add to their repertoire, their own personal interpretive framework. It is my belief that my role is to facilitate experience to help students grow and learn.

I uphold that the school itself is a social institution through which social reform can and should take place. Education and schooling are instrumental in creating social change and reform. I also hold that the purpose of education should not revolve around the acquisition of a pre-determined set of skills, but rather the understanding of one's full potential and the capacity to use those skills for the greater good in humanity. Therefore, "I must" teach my students how to serve.

Committed to Community

A service-learning course teacher connects students with community. My definition of community here is expansive. Depending on the voice of the students, it might mean a specific locality or it might mean humanity as a whole. Sergiovanni (1994) defines community as a collection of individuals who are bonded together by natural will and who are together binded to a set of shared ideas and ideals (p. xvi). Further, there is community by kinship (relation), place (a school), and of mind (beliefs and values). Even memory can lead to community as is evidenced by our community's response to our Patriot Day and Memorial Day events, and Veterans Day as well.

We hold class in a four-walled classroom, but the course itself is about what is happening outside in the real world. The needs around us guide what happens in the classroom, and the

academic benchmarks are then attached to the needs. The pioneers of service-learning believed that the combination of service and learning would improve the quality of both and that it could lead to educational reform, democratic revitalization, and positive change. Service-learning, a form of experiential learning, is distinguished by its commitment to certain values as well as its inclusion of continuous, structured reflection. The values relate to performing meaningful service that meets genuine needs in the community. My commitment to community drives my passion for service-learning.

Dewey's belief that service is a strong component in a child's education is a theme frequently intertwined with the civic responsibility of the school (Harkavy & Benson, 1998).

When the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall have the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lively, and harmonious. (Dewey, 1900, p. 44)

I understand and thrive on the extreme importance of creating, cultivating, sustaining, and extending connections between myself and other people with whom I work, teach, plan, and act. This includes many members of the community-at-large. My role as a service-learning teacher continuously expands over the years as I perceive more and more ways to make connections between curriculum and real-world issues. It is my contention that our young people, with explicit purpose in mind, can create solutions to community issues while they learn required curriculum in the classroom. Without purpose, lessons will not transcend the classroom. In many ways Dewey's works support both community studies and service experiences. Service learning in civic education brings together experiences of both rights and responsibilities, a connection that is essential to democratic communities. Experiential civic

education also develops in students a concrete and practical awareness of the concepts of public interest and public good (Hepburn, 1997).

My connections with students and parents go beyond the professional to the personal, and my relationships with community leaders, nonprofit directors, and local business owners bring a new dimension to my educational network. Kelchtermans (1993) suggests that there are unavoidable interrelationships between personal and professional identities. He expounds on the notion that teachers' identities are constructed based on the teachers' personal experiences, the social, cultural, and institutional environment in which they function on a daily basis. As I have explored my experiences, I have come to realize just how important those connections are to me. Those links I have made, some while planning and implementing service-learning projects, others with teachers, administrators, students, parents, and mentors, are very important to me. Furthermore, there are the connections made within the curriculum, which includes a purposeful link between service and academic learning.

Self-Authorship

We create a personal ideology, an internal identity, that we derive from our various personal and professional experiences (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2009; Kegan, 1994). The service-learning course teacher is not a systematic position. Self-authorship becomes the mechanism through which the service-learning course teacher frames their experience and constructs their reactions to the external world, and thus, guides students through service-learning. Self-authorship includes being a transformative learner, a learner with the ability to transform the taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, and open (Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learners are

also “emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 7-8).

I think my shift in meaning-making capacity from outside myself to inside myself has evolved greatly since my discovery of service-learning. As an educator, it is liberating to know what I am doing in my classroom will have purpose for a wider population. I am no longer following a lock-step set of rules regarding curriculum and classroom management. I think the shift is necessary in the 21st century. My self-authorship begins its evolution when we paved that pathway in Georgia, but it can be traced back to my earliest wanderings and explorations. Venturing into the creation of the service-learning class and my pursuit of a Ph.D. also are indications that I have that strong internal voice, foundation, and live by my own convictions.

As I considered the ways in which I am self-authored, I began to fill in phrases and words to describe my own personal interpretive framework and subjective educational theory based on Kelchtermans (1993) original frame. I found that the descriptive, evaluative, conative, and normative components, in retrospect, are overlapping and intertwined (see Figure 46), most connected to service, care, or community in some way. Likewise, my knowledge and beliefs support and stimulate one another. Kelchtermans has provided the essential frame to help me gain self-understanding.

Servant Leadership

As I reflect on what it truly means to be a service-learning course teacher, I keep returning to my belief that every child will be someone. They will be a part of my world whether I think they're prepared to be so or not, so at every turn, with every opportunity, I want to help them grow in positive ways. In order to help them grow, I must keep them engaged in learning, and I believe that service-learning does just that. It brings relevance to the classroom allowing

them to explore this world on their own terms, to determine needs, and to figure out how the academic learning presented to them in the classroom can help those in need.

My aim in telling about my lived experiences of personal and professional development, and of being a service-learning course teacher, is to find my narrative truth and engage the reader in a conversation as a means of understanding a greater, cultural experience (Bochner, 2012; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Yet, in sharing my experience as a service-learning course teacher in search of self-understanding, I, too, am walking away from the telling in a meaningful, reflective way. I engaged in the stories I have shared – stories of personal growth, limitation, and connection – with a reflective, critical eye (Eisenbach, 2015). “The reflexive process of researching and writing autoethnographic stories allows scholars to perform and understand themselves as cultural beings in ways unavailable prior to enacting the inquiry” (Berry & Patti, 2015, p.266).

I have learned much from my retrospective self and I have also determined a prospect for the future. As I came to understand my self-authorship, my deep commitment to my many communities, and the happiness (and sometimes heartache) that comes with my “I must” perspective of care, I have also discovered that I have emerged as a servant leader, as derived by Greenleaf (1977), when he posited, “the servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.” Years ago, I aspired to be a school leader but lost the enthusiasm when it became clear that such a position may not allow me to serve others in the way I would like. I have therefore remained in the classroom. The development of the class, a course that gave young adolescents a place to grow as future leaders, help the communities to which they belong, share power,

encourages them to put the needs of others first and helps them develop and perform as highly as possible, is my step toward leadership.

Bowman (2005) says that “servant leadership in the classroom speaks to the universal human longing to be known, to care, and to be cared for in pursuit of the common good.” (2005, p. 257). The middle level classroom, whether it is a service-learning classroom or not, is a perfect place for servant leadership to thrive. Researching about developing my skills as a servant leader gives me a prospect for the future.

Contributions

In completing this project, I seek to expand the practice and encourage other schools to try the framework for the course. I provide a narrative explanation of how a service-learning class is structured and organized. I explain the progression of teaching students to understand themselves first, and then learning to work collaboratively to identify community needs and possible solutions. I provide explanations of specific assignments in the classroom that further the academic learning as well as the service initiatives. This research also speaks to principals who might be looking for ways to bring about change in the school’s culture through service. By reading my work, they may see the service-learning classroom as a catalyst for bringing about change by the students themselves versus a top-down approach. School districts may look at this work and see the possibility for systemic change; having one classroom that integrates service-learning into the whole school, as opposed to waiting and hoping, or worse, mandating that individual classroom teachers incorporate service-learning. I also see the potential to use my findings to educate pre-service teachers about the practice of service-learning, either as an instructional strategy or a classroom framework.

Implications

One implication from this research is that it takes a unique individual to teach a service-learning course. In the event a principal seeks to offer the course at her school, she must consider first if there is someone already on staff suited to be, and interested in becoming, the teacher, or if they have the where-with-all to hire someone adequately prepared to take it on. This course should not be added with the idea of assigning a teacher who is short a section on the master schedule. A profile of a service-learning teacher, based on my personal narrative with help from my critical friends, can be found in Figure 47.

Another implication is that service-learning teachers need a support system, preferably multi-faceted, to help sustain and institutionalize a program. Having now heard the voices of other teachers, parents, former students, and support staff, I know I am in a lonely and isolated place. Having an advisory board for support could possibly have made a difference in the decision to eliminate the course. The support system needs to include school level administration as well as district interaction.

Future Research

In this age of accountability, the learning conditions must be optimal and the outcomes specific and measurable. Those who advocate for the use of service-learning in K-12 education understand the importance of advancing the research in the field. With the surge in student standardized assessment and teacher evaluation systems, as well as the loss of Learn-and-Serve funds, many regular academic classroom teachers have turned away from the use of creative and experiential instructional strategies, such as service-learning, for those more easily evaluated.

An opportunity to expand both practice and research exists in secondary courses framed by service-learning practice, an academic elective instructed by a teacher with a passion for service-

learning. I see great possibilities for longitudinal impact studies should the middle grades service-learning class be restored. The class could provide an excellent laboratory for assessing all phases and quality standards of the practice as well as documenting the development of civic identity of students.

Each year as applications roll in, I notice the dearth of applications from males. Why are so few males interested in joining the class? This is an excellent topic for future research, and it will benefit my efforts to create heterogeneous classes. I believe this is especially important at the middle grades level.

Additional qualitative work concerning support systems at the school, district, and state level for service-learning would greatly add to field. It may also uncover the issues that led to the demise of my own class. A qualitative study of enduring programs can also lend to an understanding of sustainability strategies.

Another focus of interest is the relationship, or lack thereof, between K-12 and undergraduate/graduate service-learning organizations. A review, perhaps even a comparison, of frameworks for standards and practice would greatly strengthen the field. This research will improve communication between levels of education, but also with potential partners and funding sources.

Studies that focus on a potential theory of service-learning, on how learning takes place,

A middle school service-learning teacher...

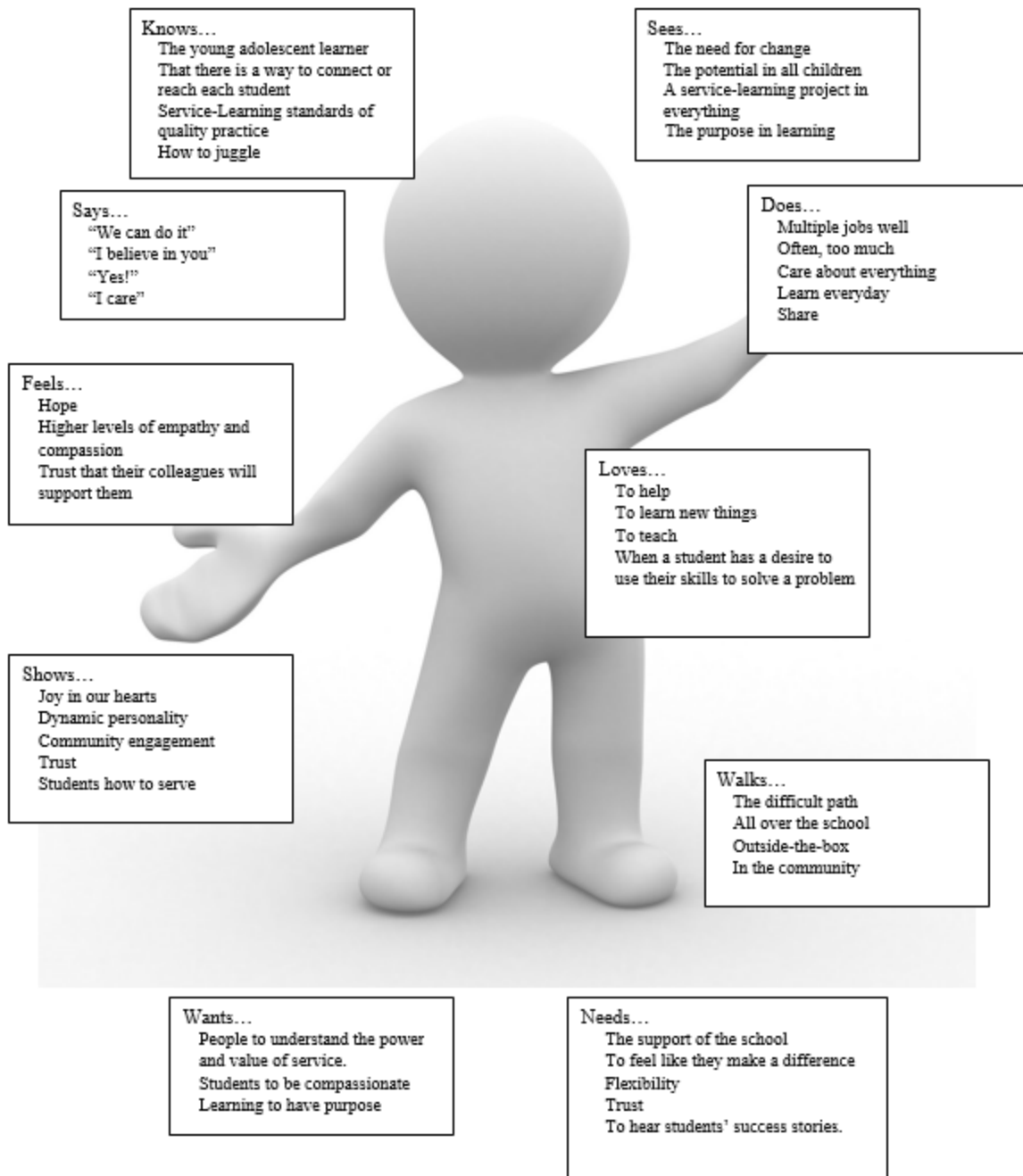


Figure 47. Profile of a middle school service-learning teacher.

what the learning is, and the relation of learning to action is greatly needed. Furco (2013)

encourages service-learning researcher to connect with and learn from "kindred fields" (p.18).

Furco (2013) specifically proposes connections with project-based learning, problem-based

learning, inquiry-based learning, and other pedagogies that contain some or most of the elements

of service-learning, since these fields have managed to build stronger research bases and have evidenced an impact in students' academic achievement.

Epilogue

January 2017

As scheduling begins, I worry that another year will go by without the service-learning class. Since the course's elimination in 2015, I have struggled to keep the service-learning programs going at my school with a youth council meeting weekly. It is not the same. I need daily contact with these students, not 45 minutes a week. I have also been persistent in communicating with school and district leaders about reinstating the course, to no avail. As requested, I submitted my curriculum and course overview. I even offered to create an item bank for the final exam. It seems that reinstating the course is a very low priority with everyone but me. I begin to waver and nearly lose my motivation in the pursuit.

I receive an email that 6th and 7th grade programming sheets, the forms they use to select courses for the next year, are going out on Monday. It is Thursday afternoon. I go in search of the guidance counselor to see if the service-learning course is listed on it. It is not. Another walk to the principal's office.

That weekend, I tell Russ that I think I am done with trying to have a course at my school. He listens to me as always. He knows that a part of my soul is dying. I go to school the next day and see Helga. I tell her I am not fighting any longer, and that, most likely, I will look for a position closer to home and just be a "normal" social studies teacher. She laughs and says, "you'll never be normal". She is correct. She encourages me to be patient and see if my latest discussions with administration will have an impact.

On Monday, my assistant principal comes to find me to tell me he still never heard from the district about the course, but that he has found a course description I could use. I can walk away or I can continue the pursuit. I can stand my semantical ground or give over and accept Peer Counseling as my working course code.

I cannot walk away. As Josie says, “it would be like walking away from yourself.” So I accept the challenge of selling a course description that no one has ever heard of and the guidance counselors cannot even describe. At the end of the week, only 14 students have applied for the obscure course. I need twenty-five.

For the next week, I talk to teachers who remember the service-learning course from years past and know the type of students I will need to make it a success. I start collecting names and talking to students. I hand-deliver applications and message parents. By the end of the process, I have 24 qualified applications and I hand over my list. I ask once again if we can pursue the service-learning course title seeing that no one in the district can produce a Peer Counseling curriculum or exam review. I get the “be happy you got a class” look.

However, on Friday, just before the final bell, my assistant principal walks in and tells me that I will have my course code back. He went to bat for me after all. I am ecstatic about the news and pleased to know my administration went to bat for me.

Next year, pending board approval, we will have a 7th grade course entitled Engaged Citizenship Through Service Learning and an 8th grade course entitled Emerging Leaders at our school. I will once again have the opportunity to teach a course framed by service-learning and allow my students the opportunity to help meet needs in the school and the community. Already, my mind is swirling with plans and ideas for next year. Hopefully, we can rebuild our program and share its success with other middle schools in our district. I know that other middle schools

have needs that a service-learning course could help meet and I would relish the opportunity to help educate interested teachers and support them as they get it started. I believe I am well-suited for the task. After all, I know what it means to be a service-learning teacher.

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Questions? customercare@copyright.com or +1-855-239-3415 (toll free in the US) or +1-978-646-2777.

Appendix B: Permission to Use Content for Table 2

Inventory of the Robert Sigmon Collection, 1962 - 2006 Mss.Coll.033

- ✧ Descriptive Summary
- ✧ Administrative Information
 - ✧ Access Restrictions
 - ✧ Copyright Notice
 - ✧ Preferred Citation
 - ✧ Gift or Purchase Note
 - ✧ Accession Information
 - ✧ Processing Information
 - ✧ Biographical Note
 - ✧ Scope and Content Note
 - ✧ Arrangement
 - ✧ Online Catalog Headings
 - ✧ Related Material
 - ✧ Detailed Description of the Collection

Elon University



© 2010 Elon University. All Rights Reserved.

Contact Information:

Belk Library Archives and Special Collections
Elon University
2550 Campus Box
Elon, North Carolina
27244
556-278-6599
Email: belkarchives@elon.edu
URL:
<http://www.elon.edu/e-web/library/libraryinfo/archiveinfo.xhtml>



This finding aid is NCEAD compliant.

Descriptive Summary

Repository: Elon University, Belk Library Archives and Special Collections
Creator: Robert Sigmon
Title: Robert Sigmon Collection, 1962 - 2006
Language of Material: Material in English
Location: The collection is located in Belk Library Archives Satellite Shelving at Elon University. Please contact the Archivist and Special Collections Librarian for further details about the location.
Abstract: This manuscript collection was compiled by Robert Sigmon, a leading educator and advocate in the field of service-learning for higher education. It is contained in 9 boxes, covering 1962-2006, with 472 folders and about 2532 items. The materials encompass self-directed learning, experiential learning, partnerships with the community, assessing public needs, internships, career opportunities, workshops, teaching, conferences on this topic, and much more. For a complete listing of the specific contents in this collection, consult the section below titled "Detailed Description of the Collection."
Extent: 3.25 linear feet, 9 archival boxes

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Copyright Notice

The nature of the Archives and Special Collections of Belk Library means that copyright or other information about restrictions may be difficult or even impossible to determine despite reasonable efforts. The Archives and Special Collections of Belk Library claims only physical ownership of most materials. The materials from our collections are made available for use in research, teaching, and private study, pursuant to the U.S. Copyright Law. The user must assume full responsibility for any use of the materials, including but not limited to, infringement of copyright and publication rights of reproduced materials. Any materials used for academic research or otherwise should be fully credited with the source.

Appendix C: Permission to Reproduce Table 3 and Figure 5

Serve. Learn. Change the world.®



July 29, 2015

The National Youth Leadership Council grants Kristy C. Verdi permission to use the *K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice*, in her 2015 Dissertation – “What is a Service-Learning Teacher? A Personal Narrative Autoethnography.

The following credit line is required:

Copyright © 2008 National Youth Leadership Council, St. Paul, MN. www.nylc.org. All rights reserved.

Permission for use includes:

- Print and electronic rights

Sincerely,



Amy Meuers
CMO, NYLC

www.nylc.org 1667 Seidling Ave N, Ste. D300 | Saint Paul, MN 55108 | T 651.631.3672 F 651.631.2965

Appendix D: District Approval for Research Study

School Board

April Griffin, Chair
Cindy Stuart, Vice Chair
Doretha W. Edgecomb
Sally A. Harris
Carol W. Kurdell
Melissa Snively
Susan L. Valdes



February 2, 2016

Superintendent of Schools

Jeff Eakins

Chief of Staff

Alberto Vázquez Matos, Ed.D.

Deputy Superintendent

Van Ayres

Chief of Schools

Larry Sykes, Ed.D.

Chief Information and Technology Officer

Anna Brown, Ph.D.

Director

Assessment and Accountability

Samuel R. Whitten

Kristy C. Verdi
2413 Bayshore Blvd., #805
Tampa, FL 33629

Dear Mrs. Verdi:

The Hillsborough County Public School district has agreed to participate in your research proposal, *What is a Service-Learning Teacher? A Personal Narrative Autoethnography*. A copy of this letter **MUST** be available to all participants at Randall Middle School to assure them your research has been approved by the district. **Your approval number is RR1516-56. You must refer to this number in all correspondence.** Approval is given for your research under the following conditions:

- 1) Participation by Randall Middle School is to be on a voluntary basis. That is, participation is **NOT MANDATORY** and you must advise **ALL PARTICIPANTS** that they are not obligated to participate in your study.
- 2) Confidentiality must be assured for all. That is, **ALL DATA MUST BE AGGREGATED SUCH THAT THE PARTICIPANTS CANNOT BE IDENTIFIED**. Participants include the district, principals, administrators, teachers, support personnel, students and parents.
- 3) Any student data **MUST** be **DESTROYED** when the project has been completed.
- 4) Since you are an employee of the Hillsborough County Public Schools, all work related to this research **must be done outside your normal working hours** unless your administrator believes the research is a function of your position.
- 5) If this work is **not part of your job, you can not use the school mail or email system** to send or receive any documents.
- 6) Research approval does not constitute the use of the district's equipment or software. In addition, requests that result in extra work by the district such as data analysis, programming or assisting with electronic surveys, may have a cost borne by the researcher.
- 7) This approval **WILL EXPIRE ON 6/30/2016**. You will have to contact us at that time if you feel your research approval should be extended.

Raymond O. Shelton School Administrative Center • 901 East Kennedy Boulevard • Tampa, Florida 33602
School District Main Office: 813-272-4000 • P.O. Box 3408 • Tampa, Florida 33602 • website: www.sdhc.k12.fl.us
Assessment and Accountability Office: 813-272-4341 • Fax: 813-272-4340
e-mail: samuel.whitten@sdhc.k12.fl.us

February 2, 2016

Page 2

- 9) A copy of your research findings must be sent to us for our files and must be submitted to this department.

Good luck with your endeavor. If you have any questions, please advise.

Sincerely,



Theodore Dwyer
Manager of Evaluation
Assessment, Accountability and Evaluation

TD/mt

cc: Janet Spence, General Instructional Leadership Director, Middle Schools
Claire Mawhinney, Principal, Randall Middle School

Appendix E: IRB Approval Letter



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
 Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
 12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
 (813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

2/16/2016

Kristy Verdi
 Teaching and Learning
 4202 E. Fowler Avenue, EDU105
 Tampa, FL 33534

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00024528

Title: What is a Service-Learning Teacher?: A Personal Narrative Autoethnography

Study Approval Period: 2/16/2016 to 2/16/2017

Dear Ms. Verdi:

On 2/16/2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within, including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):

Protocol Document(s):

[Verdi Study Protocol 252016](#)

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:

[Informed Consent Verdi.pdf](#)

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval via an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Appendix F: Initial Invitation to Participate

Initial Invitation to Participate in What is a Service-Learning Teacher?: A Personal Narrative Autoethnography

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida in the Department of Secondary Social Science Education in Tampa, Florida. You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Purpose of the Research

This research study is designed to examine my experiences as a service-learning teacher. I am specifically looking at critical events and how those critical events affected my personal and professional development as a service-learning teacher. The data from this research will be used as validating evidence to accompany the data produced from my reflective writings. The data produced from interviews will further inform my study and enrich the data. The data from our conversations will provide additional external data. It will also produce additional internal data, as our conversations will help me to remember events more clearly.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to engage in conversation with me to discuss memories that we share as they pertain to both my own personal development and to my professional development as a service-learning teacher. Your participation will take approximately 2-3 hours total. These sessions will be arranged at a time and date of your convenience. If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be selected from individuals with whom I have shared teaching experiences, community connections, and family connections. You will be invited to meet with me, hopefully in person, and engage in a conversation about what we collectively remember about the time we shared.

Potential Risks or Discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study. I would like your permission to audio and/or video tape our conversations. To maintain confidentiality, you will be assigned a pseudonym for all transcriptions. critical friends will be offered a copy of their audio files if requested. The original files will be maintained on my password-protected home computer. These files will be destroyed five years after the publication of my dissertation. Transcribed interviews will be forwarded to each participant for validation purposes.

Potential Benefits of the Research

There are no benefits to your participation in this study. Potentially, my study could help add to the body knowledge concerning why some teachers are more likely than others to use service-learning as an instructional strategy or to teach a service-learning course.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

All information obtained and or medical records will be held in strict confidentiality and will only be released with your permission. The results of this study may be published but your information such as your name and other demographic information will not be revealed.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a research subject you may refuse to participate at anytime. To withdraw from the study please contact Kristy Verdi by phone at 813-727-9813 or by email at kverdi@mail.usf.edu.

Proposed Timeline

The timeline for this study is set to begin in October 2015. I hope to begin conversations in early November 2015 and validate all transcripts with initial coding by mid December 2015. In January 2016, I would like to check my interpretations with each participant by presenting a rough draft of the narrative. By February 2016, I intend to begin editing and formatting my research report.

Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about the research, please speak with Kristy Verdi by phone at 813-727-9813 or by email at kverdi@mail.usf.edu

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to my satisfaction.

Print name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Phone _____

Appendix G: Informed Consent



Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Pro # 00024528

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

What is a Service-Learning Teacher? A Personal Narrative Autoethnography.

The person who is in charge of this research study is **Kristy C. Verdi**. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by **Dr. Michael Berson**.

The research will be conducted at locations mutually agreed upon at the convenience of the participant.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- capture and analyze shared experiences of a middle-school service-learning course teacher, and
- better understand what students learn in a service-learning classroom.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have been witness to and/or a part of experiences with the service-learning course and/or the service-learning teacher.

Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Converse with the PI about your experiences with the service-learning course and/or teacher, or other experiences with service-learning.
- Participate in a pre-arranged, unstructured interview, approximately 1-2 hour(s) in length and at the location of your choice, to review archived materials related to the service-learning course and/or teacher to stimulate memories of experiences.
- Write about any experiences you recall after the interview.
- Allow the PI to audio- and/or videotape the interview so the shared experiences can be captured for transcription to be identified by a participant-selected pseudonym. Only the PI will have access to these recordings which will be maintained on a password protected laptop for the required 5 years after the Final Report is submitted to the IRB. The recordings will then be deleted.

About 20 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no known conflict of interest.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The Principal Investigator and the Faculty Advisor.

- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

The Principal Investigator may publish what she learns from this study. The Principal Investigator will keep a written and electronic copy of your story in a locked and secured location, and will destroy all materials after five (5) years.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Kristy C. Verdi at 813-727-9813.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study and authorize that my information as agreed above, be collected/disclosed in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix H: Informed Consent – Revised Edition



Informed Consent to Participate in Research (Revised Version)

Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Pro # 00024528

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called:

What is a Service-Learning Teacher? A Personal Narrative Autoethnography.

The person who is in charge of this research study is **Kristy C. Verdi**. This person is called the Principal Investigator. However, other research staff may be involved and can act on behalf of the person in charge. She is being guided in this research by **Dr. Michael Berson**.

The research will be conducted at locations mutually agreed upon at the convenience of the participant.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to:

- capture and analyze shared experiences of a middle-school service-learning course teacher, and
- better understand what students learn in a service-learning classroom.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you have been witness to and/or a part of experiences with the service-learning course and/or the service-learning teacher.

Study Procedures:

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Converse with the PI about your experiences with the service-learning course and/or teacher, or other experiences with service-learning.
- Participate in a pre-arranged, unstructured interview, approximately 1-2 hour(s) in length and at the location of your choice, to review archived materials related to the service-learning course and/or teacher to stimulate memories of experiences.
- Write about any experiences you recall after the interview.
- Allow the PI to audio- and/or videotape the interview so the shared experiences can be captured for transcription to be identified by a participant-selected pseudonym. Only the PI will have access to these recordings which will be maintained on a password protected laptop for the required 5 years after the Final Report is submitted to the IRB. The recordings will then be deleted.
- Allow use of your approved image selected from the archived materials in the published documents that result from this study.

About 20 individuals will take part in this study at USF.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

Benefits

You will receive no benefit(s) by participating in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs

It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no known conflict of interest.

Privacy and Confidentiality

We will keep your study records private and confidential. Certain people may need to see your study

records. Anyone who looks at your records must keep them confidential. These individuals include:

- The Principal Investigator and the Faculty Advisor.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study, and individuals who provide oversight to ensure that we are doing the study in the right way.
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates this research. This includes the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP).
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, including staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

The Principal Investigator may publish what she learns from this study. The Principal Investigator will keep a written and electronic copy of your story in a locked and secured location, and will destroy all materials after five (5) years.

You can get the answers to your questions, concerns, or complaints.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, or experience an unanticipated problem, call Kristy C. Verdi at 813-727-9813.

If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638.

Consent to Take Part in this Research Study

I freely give my consent to take part in this study and authorize that my information as agreed above, be collected/disclosed in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in their primary language. This research subject has provided legally effective informed consent.

Signature of Person obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix I: District Approval for Extension of Research Study

School Board
Cindy Stuart, Chair
Sally A. Harris, Vice Chair
Lynn Gray
April Griffin
Tamara Shamburger
Melissa Snively
Susan L. Valdes



Superintendent of Schools
Jeff Eakins

Chief of Staff
Alberto Vázquez, Ed.D.

Deputy Superintendent
Van Ayres

Chief of Schools
Harrison Peters

Chief Academic Officer
Office of Teaching
and Learning
Elizabeth Agresta

November 29, 2016

Kristy C. Verdi
2413 Bayshore Blvd., #805
Tampa, FL 33629

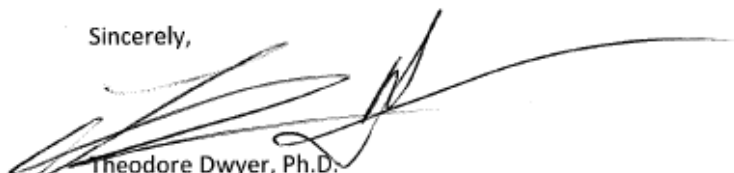
Dear Mrs. Verdi:

Your request to extend your research project, *What is a Service-Learning Teacher? A Personal Narrative Autoethnography (RR1516-56)* has been approved. This approval will expire on **5/30/2017**.

Remember, all conditions of our original letter dated **2/2/2016** still apply.

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Theodore Dwyer, Ph.D.
Manager of Evaluation
Assessment, Accountability and Evaluation

TD/mt

Appendix J: IRB Extension Approval



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
 Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
 12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
 (813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

1/19/2017

Kristy Verdi
 USF Teaching and Learning
 4202 East Fowler Avenue, EDU-105
 Tampa, FL 33620

RE: **Expedited Approval for Continuing Review**
 IRB#: CR2_Pro00024528
 Title: What is a Service-Learning Teacher?: A Personal Narrative Autoethnography

Study Approval Period: 2/16/2017 to 2/16/2018

Dear Mrs. Verdi:

On 1/19/2017, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents contained within including those outlined below.

Approved Item(s):
Protocol Document(s):
[Verdi Study Protocol 252016](#)

Following Chair Review: The reported protocol deviation(s) were found to be not serious and non-continuing. There was no increased risk to participants and no further action is required.

The IRB determined that your study qualified for expedited review based on federal expedited category number(s):

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with USF HRPP policies and procedures and as approved by the USF IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.

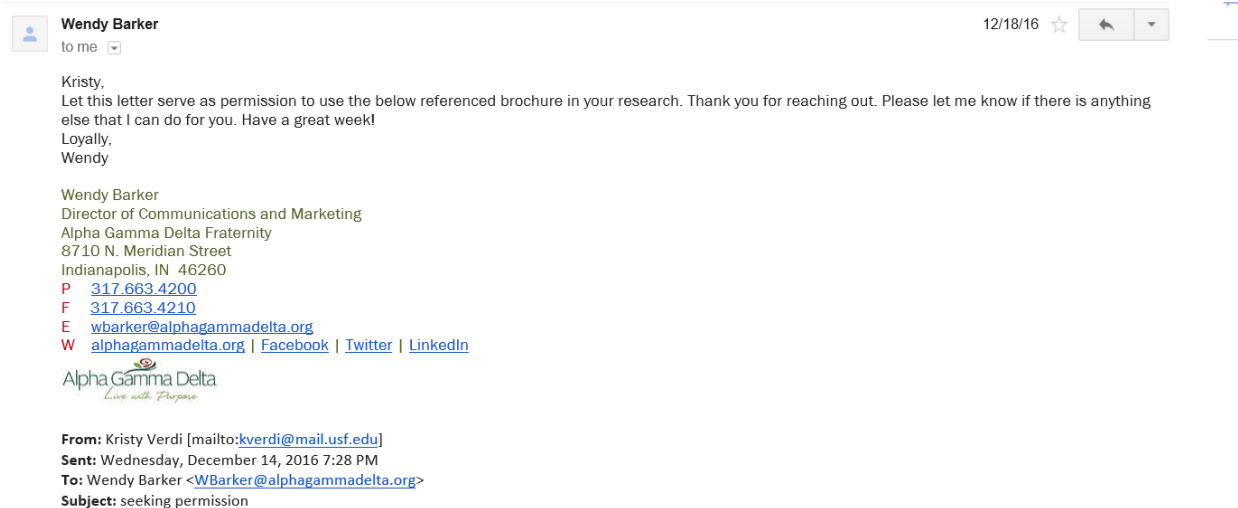
We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D.".

John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Appendix K: Permission to use image from Alpha Gamma Delta, Inc.



Kristy,
Let this letter serve as permission to use the below referenced brochure in your research. Thank you for reaching out. Please let me know if there is anything else that I can do for you. Have a great week!
Loyally,
Wendy

Wendy Barker
Director of Communications and Marketing
Alpha Gamma Delta Fraternity
8710 N. Meridian Street
Indianapolis, IN 46260
P 317.663.4200
F 317.663.4210
E wbarker@alphagammadelta.org
W alphagammadelta.org | [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/alphagammadelta) | [Twitter](https://twitter.com/alphagammadelta) | [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/alphagammadelta)



From: Kristy Verdi [mailto:kverdi@mail.usf.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, December 14, 2016 7:28 PM
To: Wendy Barker <WBarker@alphagammadelta.org>
Subject: seeking permission

Appendix L: Permission to use Gwinnett Daily Post news article

Permission Request Form

Date of Request: December 19, 2016

To: Todd Cline, Editor
Gwinnett Daily Post
725 Old Norcross Road
Lawrenceville, GA 30045

From: Kristy C. Verdi
University of South Florida
College of Education
Department of Teaching and Learning
4202 E. Fowler Ave., EDU 302
Tampa, FL 33620
813-727-5813
kverdi@mail.usf.edu

Please authorize my use of the attached section of an article and picture published in the Gwinnett Daily Post in my dissertation. Please indicate permission below and position that grants your authority to do so.

Publication Date: November 18 or 19, 2000
Article Title: Holiday Help
Article Author: Laura Ingram (Photographer Nicole Finley)
Page Numbers: Section A, page 1 and 11



Permission granted to use article in dissertation.

Print name Todd Cline Position EDITOR
Signature [Handwritten Signature] Date 12-19-16

Appendix M: CITI Human Research Curriculum Completion Report

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI) HUMAN RESEARCH CURRICULUM COMPLETION REPORT

Printed on 06/17/2014

LEARNER Kristy Verdi (ID: 1851258)
6006 Merlinwood Drive
Lithia
Florida 33547
USA

DEPARTMENT Social Science Education
PHONE 813-740-3900
EMAIL kverdi@mail.usf.edu
INSTITUTION University of South Florida
EXPIRATION DATE 06/16/2016

SOCIAL / BEHAVIORAL INVESTIGATORS AND KEY PERSONNEL

COURSE/STAGE: Refresher Course/2
PASSED ON: 06/17/2014
REFERENCE ID: 12857573

REQUIRED MODULES

REQUIRED MODULES	DATE COMPLETED
SBE Refresher 1 – Defining Research with Human Subjects	06/11/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Privacy and Confidentiality	06/13/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Assessing Risk	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Children	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – International Research	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – History and Ethical Principles	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Federal Regulations for Protecting Research Subjects	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Informed Consent	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Research with Prisoners	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Research in Educational Settings	06/17/14
SBE Refresher 1 – Instructions	06/17/14

For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI Program participating institution or be a paid Independent Learner. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI Program course site is unethical, and may be considered research misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiler Ph.D.
Professor, University of Miami
Director Office of Research Education
CITI Program Course Coordinator

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kristy C. Verdi graduated from West Georgia College (now University of West Georgia) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Parks and Recreation Management and worked in the parks and recreation field for several years. She attended Georgia State University and completed a Master of Public Administration prior to attaining teacher certification and starting a teaching career in secondary education. She completed a Specialist in Education Leadership at the University of Georgia and the Doctor of Philosophy in Education at the University of South Florida. After becoming a middle level educator in social studies, she began developing a service-learning course for young adolescents. She has been recognized as a finalist for the Hillsborough County Teacher of the Year and as the Shimberg Middle School Teacher of the Year. The Randall Area Youth Council, the service-learning club-turned-class has been recognized locally, at the state level as a Florida Service-Learning Leader School, and nationally by Kids Voting USA, 9/11.org, and Youth Service America. She has presented at the National Youth Leadership Council's Service-Learning Conference, the International Association for Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, and at Duke University's International Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education.