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ADOLESCENT GEOGRAPHIES IN THE CLASSROOM: INTERACTIONS WITH PLACE- AND COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

Anna Gahl Cole

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ADOLESCENT GEOGRAPHIES IN THE CLASSROOM: INTERACTIONS WITH PLACE- AND COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION

BY

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DISSERTATION
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

May, 2010
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, Rose and Dan Gahl, for their generosity, love, and support.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work would never have been possible without the participation, enthusiasm, and patience of the teachers and students at Jefferson Center High School. Their stories and experiences were inspiring and I owe them my deepest gratitude. Students from my Jemez Valley High School and Wilderness Charter School classrooms were also present in my head and heart throughout this project, informing my questions, experiences, and insights. I am most thankful for the opportunities to work and learn from all these determined young people and dedicated teachers. Their contributions assert the nobility, potential, and power of schooling.

My committee chair, Ruth Trinidad Galván graciously supported, guided, and challenged me throughout this effort but also enabled me to direct the project the way I wanted. A wonderful mentor and friend, she has been my role model for balancing the joys of parenting and academia with humor and grace. My doctoral committee, Betsy Noll, Lois Meyer, Don Zancanella and David Greenwood inspired and challenged me in all the ways I hoped they would: through dynamic classroom teaching, thoughtful university leadership, insightful academic research, and generous friendship. I could not have had a better team of mentors and colleagues supporting my work. I am so appreciative of their participation and support.

I owe a great deal of thanks to my tireless family. My sisters – teachers, scientists, and dancers all – remain my dearest friends and finest role models. They have deeply shaped who I am and who I want to be through the deliberate care and curiosity with which they engage the world. My parents were the “heavy lifters” of this project, looking after Henry and Wren while I spent many hours at Jefferson Center and in front of a computer. Without them, the logistics of this effort would have been impossible. It is because of my parents that my geography of Riverside is so rich and meaningful; they taught my sisters and me what it means to be part of a community – living well and deliberately in a place. I also owe a great big thanks to Henry and Caroline who are the best little travelers that I know. Though I am heartily biased, they are the most joyous, inquisitive, and darling children, consistently challenging me to be a better parent, teacher and person. Finally, my deepest gratitude is owed to my husband, Dustin. His encouragement was steadfast and his sacrifices significant as he sent us away month after month to work on this project and never complained of our absence. I would not have been able to go this far without his support, faith and grace helping me move forward.
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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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The purpose of this study was to examine three phenomena, 1.) the classroom struggles and successes of students and teachers participating in a place- and community-based curriculum; 2). students’ personal geographies: their experiences, perspectives and interpretations of their homes, school, community and city; and 3.) interactions between community-based curriculum and students’ geographies. This study goes to the intersection of place-based curriculum and students’ geographies to explore the interactions that exist between these phenomena. Grounded in critical spatial, feminist standpoint, and constructivist theories, this study draws upon scholarship in Children’s Geographies, place- and community-based education, and critical spatial studies.

The Second Tuesday Project (STP), a community-based research and service project at Jefferson Center High School, a public, urban high school in a large Midwestern city, is the focus of the curriculum study. Students in the Human Services
Course participated in the STP which required they study a community issue/problem by volunteering at a related community organization and using more traditional research methods.

Qualitative research focused on three strands: 1.) a STP curriculum study, 2.) case studies of students’ geographies, and 3.) analysis of interactions between the STP and students’ geographies. Data collection included participant-observation in the Human Services Course, interviews with teachers and students, and focus group sessions with participating students.

Curriculum study highlighted a program struggling with identifying, articulating and sharing its overarching goals and objectives but also a program creatively and successfully breaking down logistical barriers between the school and the broader community. Students’ geographies highlighted issues of race, class, and diversity through their very rich and complex experiences of place. Interactions between the curriculum and students’ geographies varied: from significant changes to students’ sense of place to little or no influence at all. Causes for the variation were primarily issues with the quality of curriculum, field experiences, or student engagement and preparedness. Implications for educators include the need for clear curricular goals and objectives and flexible approaches to integrating classroom and community learning contexts. The study also demonstrates the pedagogical potential of Children’s Geographies theories and methods.
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Chapter 1 – Introduction

Driving into the city with my high school students during field trips was always an eye-opening experience. I taught at a small, rural, and diverse school – students came from two very different Native American communities, a rural Hispanic ranching community, and a more recently settled Anglo community. I moved around the bus to sit with different groups of students and was fascinated to overhear and discuss directly their comments about the places we passed. There was Highway 1, a wide, multi-lane road lined with fast-food restaurants, bars, and gas stations where the kids with cars cruised on weekends. They had to be careful after 10pm though, when the city’s teen curfew made cruising risky business. Over there was the city park, where skater kids and smoker kids hung out after school. The kids used the old boards and blocks lying around the tennis courts for skate ramps. Beyond that massive parking lot was a mall where some students had jobs and many hung out – the food court was the place to be. And the library across the street was permissive of students coming in after school to use the computers – so long as they were quiet. The Denny’s Restaurant closest to school was a favorite spot as well. When we went in to use the restroom or to break up long trips, I learned that the corner booth belonged to the girls’ basketball team (they “tagged” the seat in permanent marker, it reads, “Lady Warriors”). If allowed the freedom to cross the street to Sonic’s Burgers, students quickly claimed the most isolated picnic table, it was also tagged: students’ initials, graduation dates, rock band symbols, and our school’s letters. Closer to school was a public streamside picnic area; parents warned their kids not to hang out there but it was a popular place to party on weekend and summer nights.
My students experienced and perceived town much differently than me. I disliked the traffic on Highway 1 and tried to avoid it. I used the public park near school because it had easy stream access for fishing. The mall was fine but the food court was always overrun with teenagers. The local library was great for renting videos and I liked their selection of children’s board books for my toddler son. I did not frequent Denny’s and Sonic’s Burgers but I would take students there in an effort to avoid larger, busier food chains. The streamside picnic areas were ideal sites for my Environmental Science class’ riparian ecology lessons. Although the sites were littered with broken glass and cigarette butts, there were picnic tables and bathrooms for students to use.

To my students, the city’s geography was a mix of places they belonged, could access with adult supervision, or were excluded. Within these spaces, they tried to carve out (literally in some cases) places of their own, removed from the adult world. My students’ sense of the world and the places they knew about were shaped by an entirely different set of rules and practices than mine. Parental expectations, city curfews, peer pressures, and the economic limits on their consumption and transportation activities (i.e. skateboards vs. cars) contributed to the places they could and couldn’t go. Even broader macro-political structures shaped their day-to-day lives: city planning and the lack of public transport for rural residents, hundreds of years of colonization imposing public lands and private land holdings on Indigenous groups, and the lack of economic development in the rural American Southwest. Influenced by their age, culture, gender, and socioeconomics, my students’ unique experiences and interpretations of life in the city made teaching about places we shared particularly interesting.
Committed to using place and community-based pedagogies in my teaching, I tried to connect our studies in the sciences to familiar and local places, contexts, and issues for my students. I felt this made learning more relevant, meaningful, and accessible. But I remember many times when my ideas of place conflicted with those of my students. During stream restoration lessons in the nearby riparian areas, students were disengaged and distracted; some were silly and made inappropriate jokes, others were embarrassed and uncomfortable as our presence there was an awkward reminder of the weekend social scene. Mapping watershed boundaries on local topographic maps was complicated by students who saw the same region bounded more importantly by disputed tribal land holdings, public lands, private ranches, and suburban sprawl. These classroom conflicts of place often created tensions between curricular lessons and student engagement. I was unprepared and unable to adequately address and bridge these differing perspectives. I needed a better understanding of the ways students experienced and perceived their world in order to better teach about the world we shared.

I was a teacher who firmly believed in the relevant and meaningful potential of place and community-based pedagogies because I’d witnessed students’ increased motivation and participation through community-based approaches. But it became apparent to me that I had very little understanding of how my place- and community-based curriculum interacted with students’ sense of the world. Students might be more engaged with place-based curriculum, but I wasn’t sure if the curriculum actually impacted, influenced, or altered their sense of the world. Could those streamside picnic areas ever be considered as more than a rebellious party place? Could students’ contested
and bounded maps of our rural community incorporate the connectedness of a shared watershed?

Articulated more broadly, I was and am interested in how young people make sense of the world, how they “map” it. As an educator committed to place- and community-based pedagogies, I am very interested in the role place-based education plays in students’ sense of place. Specifically, how does place-based curriculum impact students’ world view? Does our work as place-based educators resonate and integrate with young people’s maps of the world? How does our community- and place-based curriculum inform, challenge, or complicate students’ already established sense of place and community?

To answer these questions, I needed a better understanding of young people’s world views and learning experiences through place-based education. Scholarship on community and place-based education describes, justifies, and advocates community-based pedagogies but does not directly examine its relationship to young people’s geographies or sense of place. The field of Children’s Geographies, recently emerged from fields like Cultural and Critical Geography, focuses on the study and description of young people’s world view and sense of place; but Children’s Geographies does not look directly at how classroom curriculum contributes to young people’s geographies. I needed field-based tools to explore and link these two phenomena – children’s place-making and place-based education.

The purpose of this study was to utilize tools from Children’s Geographies, qualitative education research, and multidimensional theories of place to explore community-based education in the classroom, young people’s sense of the world and,
interactions between those two phenomena. From a practical perspective, I was interested in understanding how community-based education can best challenge and further develop young people’s sense of the world. Guiding my research were three central issues or questions: 1.) I was interested in the specific experiences and perspectives of individual students constructing a sense of place in the world. 2.) I was interested in the day-to-day challenges and successes of teachers and students incorporating community-based approaches in their teaching and learning. I wanted to know more about students’ and teachers’ experiences with community-based curriculum in the classroom. 3.) I was interested in how these two phenomena interact: how place- and community-based curriculum influences students’ sense of place.

No longer teaching or living in the Southwest, I explored these questions at a school that could not be more geographically or culturally different than rural New Mexico. I located my research at Jefferson Center High School, a large, predominantly African-American, urban high school in Riverside, a Midwestern city of over 300,000 people (all names of people and places in this study are pseudonyms). The school’s Human Services Course, part of its Human Services vocational track, was developed to support a community-based research and service program called the Second Tuesday Project (STP). In this project, teachers and students studied local social and environmental issues through partnerships with community organizations and agencies; students researched a community issue using secondary sources (articles, databases, web content) and first-hand experiences observing, volunteering and interviewing clients and professionals at a community organization related to their issue.
In order to study the community-based Second Tuesday Project curriculum, I observed classes, interviewed teachers and students, and collected samples of assignments and participating students’ work. To explore young people’s geographies, I conducted qualitative case studies of eight Jefferson Center Human Services students participating in the Second Tuesday Project. Using data from individual interviews, classroom observations, and students’ participation in focus group meetings, I described their perspectives and experiences of home, school, neighborhood and city. In order to understand the relationships between students’ geographies and their participation in the Second Tuesday Project, I relied upon interview and focus group data as well as in-depth data analysis.

I quickly found out that teachers at Jefferson Center struggled with many of the same challenges I did. They wanted to create meaningful, engaging curriculum. They wanted to use community contexts to frame learning experiences. They wanted students to apply content knowledge to local and familiar issues. In addition to these challenges, teachers at Jefferson Center struggled with funding and program stability, planning and organizing cooperatively, and motivating and supporting students.

Students’ geographies were rich, complex, and diverse. They demonstrated a wide range of experiences and perspectives of life in Riverside. Collectively, they highlighted the centrality of race, class, age and gender in the political, socioeconomic and environmental experiences of young people in the city.

The relationships between students’ geographies and their participation in the STP varied dramatically. In a few cases, individual students’ sense of themselves, their community, and their futures was shaped significantly by their STP experiences. For
other students, the project held less meaning due to the quality of the STP curriculum, students’ curricular motivation and engagement, or a combination of related factors.

For educators, this study offers a window into the struggles and successes of a team of teachers trying to build a course and program around a community-based research and service project. It also offers “maps” of students’ lives, demonstrating the diversity of experiences and knowledge young people have of their surroundings. By looking at the relationships between young people’s geographies and community-based education, this study highlights aspects of place-based curriculum that can be most meaningful and transformative for student learning. The study provides practical insights about curricular planning and development for educators trying to utilize place- and community-based pedagogies in meaningful and productive ways.

For researchers, theoretical frameworks and methodologies from Children’s Geographies offer new approaches for studying schooling. In this study, I use spatial lenses to study curriculum design and practice and the knowledge students bring to the classroom. I argue that spatial approaches are applicable, insightful, and important for understanding the role of schooling in young people’s lives.

During focus group sessions with students, I utilized spatially-oriented research tools like mapping to make abstract ideas and questions about place more concrete. As a result, the sessions were rich with insightful dialogue, meaningful conversation, and significant learning opportunities for participants. This study suggests that there are many potential pedagogical applications of Children’s Geographies’ methods and frameworks for educators and researchers. Far removed from the rural landscapes of Northern New Mexico, I found that the teachers, students and landscapes of the urban
Midwest have plenty to teach me and others everywhere about the centrality of place in education, research and our day-to-day lives.

*Mapping the Literature: Place and Spatial Theoretical Frameworks, Community-based Education, and Children’s Geographies*

For their students, teachers, parents and communities, the public institutions of schools are sites of cultural and social reproduction. Hutchinson (2004) writes, "Schools are places that are imbued with meaning - both shared and private. They act as conduits of ideas and practices within which cultural knowledge, norms, values, attitudes, and skills are passed from one generation to the next" (2004, p. 9). Through their written and unwritten rules, values, expectations and organization, schools reproduce dominant cultural, racial and economic structures and ideologies. Schools are also political institutions, where power and control of young people, information, time and space is scripted, mandated - and only sometimes negotiated - with its inhabitants.

As places where students learn dominant ideologies of their communities, towns, states and countries, schools are also key players in the cultural politics of place – defining dominant ways of understanding social and ecological environments. But schools are not the only source from which students come to know and understand where they live. Young people bring to the classroom a wealth of experience and knowledge about their environment from personal and social lives outside the school. Young people’s understanding of the world has been shaped by a multitude of sources (school, peers, family, friends, media) and individuals must negotiate meanings about place by integrating or rejecting various perspectives, experiences, and histories.

When school curriculum incorporates place and community-based studies, content learning revolves around places and contexts that are local and familiar to
students. These place-based curricular efforts meet with young people’s previously established and still developing sense of place. The purpose of this study was to go directly to this intersection, this meeting of geographies, this overlaying of maps, to see what becomes of the encounter. When school activities directly attempt to teach about places and community contexts young people already have a “map” for, what do young people do with the new information? Is the information really new? Is it contradictory? How do young people incorporate, dismiss, or challenge curricular knowledge of place? How does it inform or negate their personal geographies? And what does this interaction tell us about our students, our curriculum, and our communities?

In this section, I will explore some of the underlying spatial theories, curricular ideas, and research methodologies that informed and guided my questions and the resulting study. I will begin by exploring the theoretical dimensions of space and place that provided a framework for my place-based curriculum study and the case studies of students’ geographies. I will then define and describe community- and place-based education as a curricular approach, emphasizing its relevance and utility in the classroom. Then, I will describe the relatively new field of Children’s Geographies, highlighting its significance for educators and applications to this study. Finally, I will describe the ways feminist standpoint theories and social constructivism also contributed to the theoretical framework of this study.

**Place and Spatial Theories**

The use of place and space as a frame of analysis has been explored in many fields (Basso, 1996; hooks, 1991; Lefebvre, 1974; Soja, 1989; Tuan, 1977). More common in geography, anthropology and sociology, spatial approaches have only
recently been directly applied to education and schooling (Bettis & Adams, 2005; Hutchison, 2004). In this section, I will outline some of the formative ideas and theories about place that helped contextualize my research questions and focus my data analysis. I will also describe in more detail some of the terminology I use throughout the study including “space,” “place,” “geography(ies),” and “sense of place.”

Definitions and interpretations of place and space are diverse and many. At a very basic level, place can be considered a bounded, specific, tangible (or at the very least, describable) location or environment, whereas “space” is often used to reflect a more open, unbounded, non-specific location or environment. I will rely upon these general distinctions but also want to suggest a great deal more with my use of the terms.

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1977) work on space and place is often considered the foundation of modern human geography. Tuan expands traditional definitions of human geography as the study of human interactions with the environment to incorporate the many ways human experience imparts meaning to places. Tuan uses concepts like permanence, familiarity, orientation, emotion and experience to distinguish notions of space and place: “Space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning” (1977, p. 136). He looks closely at the role of human experience in understanding and forming connections to place, he attempts to “describe and try to understand what “being-in-the-world” is truly like” (1977, p. 201). Tuan argues that young children often describe landscapes depicted in works of art as very physical, concrete places. Adults, on the contrary, describe the same landscapes as rich with emotion and feeling. Tuan’s work explores these sorts of distinctions and phenomena - the way human experience attaches meaning and emotion onto places and spaces.
Cultural anthropologists traditionally described place as settings for cultural activities. In recent decades, anthropologists have revised this approach to explore a more dynamic relationship between place and culture, sometimes using place as the primary lens for understanding human culture and society (Appadurai, 1988; Basso, 1996; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992). Anthropologists Olwig & Gulløv (2003) echo Tuan’s ideas when describing human cultures and their relations to place:

Places are cultural constructions that emerge in the course of social life as human beings attribute meaning to their surroundings and thus turn them into places of special value.... Furthermore, it is apparent that conceptions of place are continuously negotiated and reformulated in the context of ongoing social life and from different social positions, in the light of the exposure to and intrusions from the wider world that particular people experience (2003, p. 7).

Feminist geographers further these ideas by looking at the political dimensions of place and space. McDowell (1999) describes place as “contested, fluid, and uncertain” (1999a, p. 4). She explains,

Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience (1999, p. 4).

Through this framework, humans can be located at the center, margin or periphery of places based on social and political constructions of race, class, gender, age, and language.

Massey (1994) significantly furthered place and spatial theories with her challenge to social researchers to develop a “progressive sense of place” (1994, p. 155). Massey describes places as “processes” that are not static; they are unbounded without simple divisions and do not have singular identities but are full of internal conflicts. Massey explains that,
The specificity of place is continually reproduced, but it is not a specificity which results from some long, internalized history. There are a number of sources of this specificity - the uniqueness of place. There is the fact that the wider social relations in which places are set are themselves geographically differentiated. Globalization (in the economy or in culture, or in anything else) does not entail simply homogenization. On the contrary, the globalization of social relations is yet another source of (the reproduction of) geographical uneven development, and thus of the uniqueness of place. There is the specificity of place which derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations....And finally, all these relations interact with and take a further element of specificity from the accumulated history of a place, with that history itself conceptualized as the product of layer upon layer of different sets of linkages, both local and to the wider world (1994, pp. 155-156).

Massey’s progressive sense of place describes a much more complex, fluid, and layered concept of place then previously imagined. She ascribes multiple scales of influence and participation and multiple layers of meaning and significance to humans acting within spaces. She also highlights the importance of social relationships characterizing and constructing places. She explains, “the crisscrossing of social relations, of broad historical shifts and the continually altering spatialities of the daily lives of individuals, make up something of what a place means, how it is constructed as a place” (Massey, 2001, p. 462).

The construction of places can be described as a “sense of place.” This concept draws on the expansive set of ideas about place and space to describe how individuals perceive and relate to environments. Tuan (1980) suggests a sense of place “implies a certain distance between self and places that allows the self to appreciate place… [it is] actively created through speech, gesture, and the making of things” (1980, p. 3). Olwig (1991) adds that a sense of place emerges “when place is experienced as an affectively charged world of meaning…” (1991, p. 7).
Children’s geographer Catling (2005b) argues that it is through experience in place that young people construct a sense of place. He explains that a sense of place is built from four key knowledges: the free exploration that fosters general learning about places; local knowledge about places of recreation, homes, schools, shops, etc.; sites of personal and social attachment; and the specifics of places for appropriate use and avoidance. He suggests that a sense of place is constructed primarily by social environments and feelings for place; he considers the physical environment less important.

Place-based educators Haas and Nachitigal (1998) explain that to foster a sense of place, educators must focus on five dimensions of place and community: a sense of place – living well ecologically; a sense of civic involvement – living well politically; a sense of worth – living well economically; a sense of connection – living well spiritually; and a sense of belonging – living well in community. In essence, each of these characteristics of a “sense of place” explore the ways humans attribute meaning to place based on multiple dimensions of experience.

A “sense of place” expands ideas about relationships between humans and their environment. It suggests that places and understandings of places are constructed as humans experience and interpret their environments. This concept is useful as I seek to understand how curriculum influences, alters, or challenges young people’s sense of place.

Gruenewald (2003) summarizes multidisciplinary frameworks of place and space to highlight the ways traditional schooling dismisses the centrality of place in human experience, culture, and society. His analysis serves three purposes: to show how place
can operate as a unit of cultural and ecological analysis; to demonstrate how places are
innately pedagogical; and to argue that education needs to pay more attention to places.
Gruenewald’s argument for place-conscious education is important for progressive
educators and I will explore it further in following sections on place- and community-
based education. In terms of describing this study’s foundational frameworks of place
and space, his analysis of multidisciplinary spatial frames is instructive.

Gruenewald organizes ideas of place into five categories: the perceptual, the
sociological, the ideological, the political, and the ecological. In the perceptual
dimension, phenomenologies of place highlight the characteristics of place that awaken
human senses, allowing humans to perceive places as tangible and concrete locales.
Places are alive, Gruenewald argues, “people are capable of perceiving places and
learning from that direct experience” (p. 625). From a sociological framework, place is a
socially constructed concept. Humans construct ideas of place and space by imparting
them with meaning. Gruenewald explains these constructions are cultural products,
reflective of different cultural values, practices, and systems. As an ideological concept,
place and space can be organized through systems of hegemony and domination, “places
and spaces are expressive of ideologies and relationships of power” (p. 628). Here,
Gruenewald examines ideas of public versus private space and the challenges land
ownership presents for community organization, equality, and cohesiveness. Through the
political dimension of place, places and spaces are reframed as territories – physical and
abstract spaces where power, resistance, and identity can be asserted. Finally,
Gruenewald surveys fields like ecofeminism, environmental justice, social ecology and
bioregionalism to examine the ecological aspects of place and its ties to environmental and human oppression, marginalization, domination, and destruction.

Collectively, I refer to this dynamic body of spatial knowledge and experience as a young person’s “geography” or sense of place. The process of learning, living, experiencing and creating this knowledge I term “place-making” or the “construction of place.” What I like about these multidimensional meanings of place is that they offer a complex and fluid idea of place construction, referencing Massey, Gruenewald, McDowell and others’ complex understandings of human environments.

Multidisciplinary spatial frameworks locate young people as both actors and receptors in the construction of their geographies; at times they are directly responsible for creating their environments, at others young people are restrained by dominant ideologies and hegemonic spatial constructions. I will explore and describe participants’ geographies as rich with meaning and power, margins and centers; they are unbounded and fluid, multiscale and local, made from social relationships and personal experiences. I embrace the concept of place as a multilayered framework with many meanings; I utilize the terms “place” and “space” with this complex referencing in mind.

For example, Gruenewald’s five dimensions of space were directive as I clarified my understanding of place and space for this research. His dimensions helped me articulate research questions and develop focused methodologies in order to understand and know place-making when I encountered it in the field. I was interested in young people’s perceptual understandings of place: the physical, map-able, photographable locales they visit or inhabit on a day to day basis (i.e., school, work, home, room, bathrooms, lockers, cars, Internet sites). I was interested in the sociological aspect of
these places – the meaning, value, and ways of thinking about places that further enrich young people’s perceptual places. For example, I was interested in the “fun places,” the “boring places,” the “stressful, lonely, scary, or happy” places participants inhabited. I wanted to know why young people associated specific meanings with specific places in their everyday lives. I was also interested in the ideological spaces of young people’s lives. I wanted to know more about the ways dominant cultural ideas shaped participants’ sense of place. I was interested in the hegemonic structures shaping places as either appropriate or inappropriate for teenagers and the sense of inclusion or exclusion participants felt towards their surrounding environments. I was interested in the political aspects of young people’s geographies. Which places did they find empowering, oppressive, marginalizing, identity-forming, safe or endangered? What role did agency play in their experience of a place? Finally, I was interested in the ecological dimensions of young people’s geographies, how did they incorporate elements of the non-human world in their geographies? What role did the rivers, woods, climate, geography and local flora and fauna play in their sense of place, community and city?

Though each of these dimensions helped me explore place with students as a multidimensional concept, the social and political dimensions seemed more accessible through this project. In Chapter 4, I grapple with why others, like the ecological dimension of place, were more challenging to identify and interpret.

*On place and schooling.*

Young people spend a great deal of time in schools; it is a site of both intimate and personal, public and institutional experiences. Multidimensional frameworks of place describe school as a complex perceptual, social, ideological, political and even
ecological environment. For education researchers, spatial frameworks encourage the dynamic mapping of schools in order to describe their significance and meaning to students; mapping school highlights its physical characteristics, social relationships, political dynamics, and cultural ideologies. Spatial frameworks also question how schools operate at both local and global scales, how the boundaries between school and community are defined, and schooling’s relationship to the non-human world. Thus, multidimensional spatial frameworks provide educators with a unique way of describing and understanding how schooling works for and with human communities, especially its students. My goal in this research is to approach the study of the Jefferson Center Human Services curriculum using these frameworks and questions.

*Community- and Place-Based Education*

Central to my study is Jefferson Center High School’s Second Tuesday Project, a community-based curriculum focusing on understanding the social complexities and needs of the Riverside community. In order to describe the project, its various components, processes and outcomes, it is important first to revisit scholarship behind community-based education efforts like the Second Tuesday Project.

Also called community-based education, place-conscious education, or environmental education, place-based education has been described as learning that uses local communities to ground curriculum in contexts that are relevant, familiar, and meaningful to students. Students are encouraged to apply traditional content learning to real-world issues by actively participating in community processes and decision-making. Brooke (2003) explains,

Place-conscious education… is schooling that focuses on the necessary relations - cultural, natural, agricultural - that shape a given place and its
human communities. By centering education in local civic issues, history, biology, economics, literature, and so forth, learners will be guided to imagine the world as intradependent, filled with a variety of locally intradependent places, and to develop a richer sense of citizenship and civic action (p. 6).

Place-based education is thought to provide a relevant alternative to nationally standardized content that often does not necessarily relate to students’ immediate lives and experiences. In a classroom, place-based curriculum demonstrates the utility, applicability, and relevance of learning by connecting classroom activities to local contexts and issues. For example, students in a history class conduct oral histories at a local nursing home to learn about their town’s history. Students in math classes use calculations of demographic data to recommend to city planners areas in need of economic development. Art students participate in public art projects like murals or streetlight banners. Gruenewald (2003) explains that the primary goal of place-conscious education is “to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there” (p.620).

Most often, community-based learning requires that schools transgress traditional school-community boundaries and directly connect student learning to community issues, events, organizations, and contexts. Longo (2007) explains,

Education in the community is active learning that takes place outside of, but often connected with, the classroom. It involves more than a one-time community service project; it means intentionally putting education in the context of long-term community-building efforts. It is most often place-based, using a collaborative, integrated, problem-solving approach (2007, p. 10).

Lane and Dorfman (1997) argue that in collaboration with community, community-based learning fosters strong social networks that increase social capital and develop active, democratic participation. They explain that these efforts “increase the ability and
capacity of the community to utilize stocks of social capital to produce meaningful and sustainable community renewal” (Lane & Dorfman, 1997, p. 10).

For students, place-based educators argue that framing learning in local places and issues and encouraging student participation in civic activities will increase student motivation and interest in learning (Lewicki, 2000; Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006; Smith, 2002; Theobald & Curtiss, 2000; Umphrey, 2007). Theobald (2006) writes:

… more than just reaping the instructional benefits of embedding subject matter into the particularities of the place where students happen to live, place-based education intends to increase the motivation to learn among students, as this type of study enables them to see the value of greater intellectual leverage over their immediate environment (p. 316).

Keyes and Gregg (2001) explain that community-based practices have been shown to decrease vandalism and teen pregnancy, improve graduation rates and student attendance, and increase community support for schools, parent participation, community unity, and a sense of civic responsibility.

Like Keyes and Gregg (2001), many researchers also cite the potential of place- and community-based education to increase students’ sense of civic responsibility and develop a better understanding and connection to their community (Lane & Dorfman, 1997; Melaville et al., 2006; Williams, 2003). Perrone (2000) asserts that community-based learning expands what students know about the world:

Centering learning on the immediate setting, expanding one's understanding of the world by working from the familiar and known to what is more distant, and understanding that students must construct their own knowledge to assure deep learning are long established and important educational directions (2000, p. 2).

Another way of framing these arguments is to say that one of the primary goals or outcomes of community- and place-based education is a broader and more complex
understanding of one’s community and world – a significant expansion in the way one perceives and engages with the social, cultural, and ecological environment. In other words, place- and community-based education transforms participants’ sense of place.

By building on prior knowledge of communities and local contexts, place- and community-based education strives to enrich young people’s knowledge of place through experiential, problem-based learning activities in the community, thus altering their geographies. This point is significant, especially in the context of this study. My intent here is to look precisely at this transformation, in order to understand how and to what extent community-based education impacts young people’s sense of place.

As a former educator committed to place and community-based methodologies, I wanted to know if community-based pedagogies really transform the way young people see the world. Is there really a shift in world view through place-based education? What does that shift look like? How do educators know a change is happening? What aspects of place-based education are most essential in supporting a transformation? In order to answer these questions, I needed to closely study a community-based curriculum— for this project I chose the Jefferson Center Second Tuesday Project. But I also needed tools and methodologies that would help me investigate young people’s geographies of home, school, community, and city. The relatively new field of Children’s Geographies offered those perspectives and approaches.

Children’s Geographies

Children’s Geographies explores the places and spaces that make up young people’s lives. Building on place and spatial theories from anthropology and critical geography, children’s geographers explore place as a social construction, a physical
location, a social position, and a political territory. Children’s Geographies incorporates ideas of human and critical geographers in a discipline that “is moving towards a solidly grounded social and cultural geography of children which acknowledges processes of exclusion, sociospatial marginalization and boundary conflicts with adults and parents” (H. Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 1998, p. 82).

Meriting its own peer-reviewed journal in 2003, Children’s Geographies, the field incorporates ideas from the new social studies of childhood (S. L. Holloway & G. Valentine, 2000; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998) which offer two ways of thinking about children: first, that childhood is a social construction with different meanings across different places and times, and second, that children are active agents who construct their own cultures and spaces independently from adults. Children’s geographers seek to understand the ways in which young people, as a marginalized population (non-adult), occupy, negotiate, describe and create places of importance in their day-to-day lives. Valentine, Skelton and Chambers (1998) explain,

Given that young people are invariably marginalized within the wider society and have little, if any, input in public policy debates which directly impact on their lives, empirical research with young people provides an opportunity to increase our understanding of their lives and in some situations to contribute to academic or public debates which play a part in social construction of youth (1998, p. 23).

Research in Children’s Geographies is useful to this study for a number of reasons. The discipline’s focus is on the spatial lives of young people. I was interested in how young people construct a sense of place and understand their positionality in community and society; these are similar to questions posed by children’s geographers. Additionally, research in Children’s Geographies offers unique methodological approaches to working with young people around issues of place and space; I will
examine some of these methods more closely in Chapter 2. In this section, I will describe a number of Children’s Geographies’ studies I’ve found instructive and highlight the insights they offer about young people’s geographies.

Wridt (2004) examines the ways New York City teens use the social construct of their “block” to assert agency, construct identity, and negotiate neighborhood territories. She looks at young people’s attitudes and behaviors towards public spaces in their neighborhoods and the ways their actions and discourse within and about these spaces form a sense of place attachment and social belonging. Young people’s clothing, bodies and social actions have different meanings and relevance based on whose territorial block they are in. Wridt explains, “Block politics is an expression of young people’s gendered and racialized identities and social struggle to spatially differentiate themselves from one another using ‘the block’ as a group signifier” (p. 217).

Wridt situates block politics and young people’s identity within larger social structures like race, class, gender, and socioeconomics as well as wider social processes of geographic and economic exclusion. Her work has found relevance with community organizers and local schools; based on her explanations of block politics, youth centers and schools organized after-school programs and athletic leagues in ways that would mediate block territoriality and social conflict between participating youth.

Children’s geographers’ work with adolescents explores the fuzzy “betweenness” (Weller, 2006) of adolescents – not quite children, not quite adults. Because teenagers’ geographies often include more “adult spaces” than younger children, their ability and desire to structure those spaces often conflicts with adult ideas of appropriate behavior and participation. There is a great deal of research in Children’s Geographies that
explores the ability, desire, and outcomes of young people actively participating in community and civic activities in an effort to create and define appropriate places for themselves in the community (Bretibart, 1998; Freeman, Nairn, & Sligo, 2003; O'Toole, 2003; Wyness, 2003).

Weller (2006) argues that adolescents’ geographies can combat negative stereotypes about young people's community involvement and improve political relationships and social representations of teens. In her research studying teenagers' experiences of inclusion/exclusion in civic activities on their rural UK island, Weller found that the day-to-day “seemingly banal” experiences of young people reflect broader social processes of exclusion and misrepresentation. Weller describes five key issues of interest to teenagers in her study:

1. The desire to be treated as a respected and valued member of society/or citizen in the here-and-now;
2. meaningful participation and consultation;
3. consideration by policy makers of teenaged-centered services and places to go;
4. respect for their own spaces;
5. services that allow independence, for example, accessible and affordable public transport (2006, p. 105).

Weller’s research exemplifies the political nature of Children’s Geographies; the study of space and place highlights the marginalization and exclusion of young people from their communities. Like Wridt (1999), Weller’s work also strives to be applicable to communities searching to better understand and include young people in political processes.

Bettis and Adams (2005) compile a body of research that explores critical places for American girls’ identity construction in and around schools but not in traditional classrooms. They find that although most adults emphasize classroom spaces for
meaningful learning, young people often highlight “in-between” spaces (2005, p. 5) as most important to their daily lives. Bettis and Adams (2005) explain that the school bathroom, the back of the bus, cheerleading practice, and school-based programs for pregnant girls are important spaces where girls explore identities and assert agency because the girls create those places and communities. What is surprising about this research is the way spaces adults consider insignificant are actually critical, contested, and empowering spaces for young girls. Bettis and Adams argue that their findings have important implications for educators:

First, we have learned that place must be taken seriously in schooling, and obviously we are not talking about the classrooms of schools; second, that teachers and scholars need to understand the socialization of girls or the "production of girlhood" differently; and third that by taking place seriously and understanding the production of girlhood differently, we can construct a pedagogy that is place and gender based (2005, p. 272).

Although children’s geographers like Bettis, Adams and others (Fielding, 2000; Lorimer, 2003; Meinert, 2003) describe the implications of young people’s geographies for educators, research in Children’s Geographies lacks a clear connection to education and curriculum. Though Children’s Geographies is a distinctly interdisciplinary field merging cultural anthropology, critical geography, sociology, and even architecture, it has not linked with educational research as extensively. The few studies that focus on geographies of schooling emphasize children’s spaces within schools (but not classrooms) (Bettis & Adams, 2005), children’s spatial experiences of playgrounds (Ferré, Guitart, & Ferret, 2005; Gagen, 2000; Thomson, 2005), and community perceptions of and relationships with schools (Lorimer, 2003; Meinert, 2003; Nieuwenhuys, 2003). Critical geographer Gagen (2004) writes “Along with the home, the school is the single most important - in terms of time - institutional space in which
childhood is experienced in Western societies” (2004, p. 409). But rarely has Children’s Geographies made a deliberate effort to explore the learning activities within schools or how those activities influence young people’s geographies. Morris-Roberts (2004) argues that “the school and wider educational establishments remain, with a few notable exceptions, an under researched space of learning in geography” (2004, p. 240). I have argued elsewhere (Cole, 2009b) the applicability of Children’s Geographies for educators seeking to better understand students’ lives outside the classroom and the complexity of place in teaching and learning.

Catling’s (2005a) school-based research in Children’s Geographies is an exception; focusing on elementary students, he links young people’s geographies to place-based curriculum. He examines the discontinuity between young children’s geographies and the federally mandated geography curriculum offered in British primary schools. He describes the lack of relatedness between children’s experiences of the world and the adult-generated descriptions and constructs of the world offered through geography curriculum. Catling found that children experience their local neighborhoods and communities experientially, as places for doing, thinking, feeling and being whereas the geography curriculum in schools relies far more on descriptive analyses of place (p.329).

Catling argues for geography curriculum that involves children in curricular decision-making and organization to create more relevant and engaging learning opportunities:

…there is room for topics not only of a local and environmental nature, related to understanding places as children perceive them, but also concerning others who impact on the children’s lives, and which can clearly draw on their personal geographies of the locality (p. 340-341).
Though Catling’s research directly addresses the connections between Children’s Geographies and place-based curriculum, it does not examine the role of curriculum in shaping children’s experience or construction of local place. His emphasis is also on primary school children, not teenagers.

Children’s Geographies provide unique ways of learning about children’s experiences of place and how they construct and understand the spaces they inhabit within their schools, communities, cities, and worlds. Studies in Children’s Geographies highlight the importance of place for young people’s identity construction and developing sense of agency and autonomy. Children’s geographers describe young people’s desire to participate actively in adult spaces but also to construct their own spaces outside the adult world. Though there is little in Children’s Geographies directly related to schooling and curriculum, the field lays the groundwork for exploring and aligning young people’s geographies with curriculum about place. For this study, Children’s Geographies offered a theoretical framework and methodological approach for entering into the study of young people’s sense of place. It provided a lens through which I could study and analyze Jefferson Center students’ experiences of place in order to understand the way their participation in the Second Tuesday Project impacted their geographies.

Additional Frameworks: Feminist Standpoint Theories and Social Constructivism

Feminist standpoint theories.

Hartstock (1983) coined the term “standpoint” to explain the unique lenses through which individuals perceive the world (i.e. race, sex, gender, class, age). Critical researchers use the concept of standpoint to describe the perspectives from which their participants experience and know the world as well as to clarify their own positionality as
a researcher. Standpoint theories are used to better validate and describe the source of an individual’s knowledge based on their unique set of experiences as a raced, classed, and gendered person. Sprague (2005) writes, “Standpoint epistemology argues that all knowledge is constructed in a specific matrix of physical location, history, culture, and interests, and that these matrices change in configuration from one location to another” (2005, p. 41). Feminist researchers have further developed the concept of standpoint to include power, authority and politics as important frameworks for understanding individuals’ knowledge and experiences.

Haraway (1999) interprets standpoint physically, exploring the “embodied” nature of knowledge. Arguing that knowledge is always connected to a physical, human body and characterized by that individual’s unique experiential frameworks, she describes “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” as capable of achieving true and authentic “partial perspectives” (p.178). Haraway terms these partial perspectives “situated knowledges” (p.178). She explains,

I am arguing for a politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. These are claims on people’s lives; the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity (1999, p. 181).

Standpoint epistemologies were instructive in this study as my case studies examined the ways individual students approach the question of where they are and how they experience, describe, and construct their geographies. I was interested in young people’s experiences at a particular time and place in their lives and their unique gendered, raced, classed, and aged positioning. Standpoint epistemologies inherently incorporate ideas of space and place through their emphasis on positioning, location, and
situated realities. These are precisely the realities of young people’s lives I was trying to unearth: their perceptual, sociological, ideological, ecological, and political positionings in their homes, schools and communities.

Feminist standpoint epistemologies are also political. Weiler (1988) describes three major themes of feminist research: first, a sensitivity to power; second, an emphasis on lived experience and everyday life; and third, a strong political commitment (p. 58-59). Sprague (2005) describes four guidelines for critical research methodology that also include a political emphasis:

1. Work from the standpoint of the disadvantaged;
2. ground interpretations in interests and experience;
3. maintain a strategically diverse discourse;
4. create knowledge that empowers the disadvantaged (2005, p.162-163).

A political research agenda resonates with the underlying motivators for this study. I firmly believe that teenagers, actively challenging, resisting, and constructing places and spaces in their lives, can insightfully speak to issues of exclusion and marginalization in the adult world. Well aware of the tendency of educators to unfairly categorize, stereotype and marginalize their teenage students, I wanted to find ways educators can better understand the lives and experiences of young people so that we can create with our students more respectful and appropriate curriculum, relationships, classrooms, schools, and communities.

My work is also informed by feminist standpoint theories’ sensitivity to power in the researcher-subject relationship. I have included in my analysis careful considerations of political dynamics between me and participants in an effort to provide a critical understanding of my presence in these findings and the knowledge participants and I created together through the study. Though I strove to make all interactions with
Jefferson Center students and faculty supportive, open, positive, and collaborative, my presence throughout the study as a White, middle-class, former Riverside resident and initially pregnant woman, certainly shaped researcher-participant interactions. Feminist standpoint theories offered me the lenses, foci, and frameworks to more clearly deconstruct these dynamics.

Feminist standpoint theories emphasize the situated subjectivity of human knowledge and experience, the critical role of the situated and subjective researcher, and the strong political currents present in research design, practice, and reporting. These theories guided my research questions, design, and approaches; in fact, one of the central issues I was exploring – the geographies of young people – is, at its core, an issue of positioning. Sprague (2005) writes:

…standpoint epistemology integrates assumptions about the socially constructed character of subjects and also of the things we seek to understand with the materiality of the world and people’s practical activity in it. Knowers are specifically located in physical spaces, in systems of social relations, within circulating discourses (2005, p. 47).

It was these worlds, places, activities, systems and discourses that I set out to understand more clearly by looking at the intersections between young people’s geographies and community-based curriculum. Feminist standpoint theories offer Children’s Geographies a similar but more focused lens emphasizing the uniquely situated geographies of individual children – children who are mapping, interpreting, and living their lives from very distinct historical, cultural, raced, classed, and gendered perspectives.

Social constructivism.
Feminist standpoint epistemologies describe the importance of positioning and the situationality of subjects. They do not directly address the origins of those positionings.
To what extent are “knowers,” as Sprague (2005) described them above, responsible for their positioning? How do “knowers” get to those physical spaces, what is their role creating and constructing the associated social relations and discourses? How are those places subjects find themselves in physically, socially, ideologically, politically and ecologically constructed by the subjects?

Phillips (1995) writes that “…human knowledge – whether it be the bodies of public knowledge known as the various disciplines, or the cognitive structures of individual knowers or learners – is constructed” (1995, p. 5). Social constructivism focuses on the role of the subject - the knower - in creating knowledge and orienting themselves in their surroundings. Lincoln (2005) describes two dimensions of constructed knowledge that I find directly relevant to this study:

…constructivism…attends to the meaning-making activities of active agents and cognizing human beings. These meaning-making activities embody both physical and temporal data, acquired through the senses, and the interaction of these physical and temporal data with values, beliefs, opinions, prejudices, hopes, dreams, fears, aspirations, fantasies, attitudes, adopted roles, stereotypes, and other forms of mental processes and received and created knowledge of both individuals and groups. Meaning-making thus engages two dimensions of individual social life: actual events and concrete situations, and the particular and individual mental stances which impute meaning to those events and situations (2005, p. 61).

In this study, I am interested in the actual places and concrete events students experience and the meaning they attribute to those experiences. I am interested in how students’ STP experiences are incorporated into their understanding of the concrete social, cultural, political and ecological environments and contexts of their communities.

Feminist standpoint theories and social constructivism helped me locate my participants and myself in the research process. They offered useful frames for understanding the phenomena of place-making and suggest models of researcher-
participant relationship that resonate with how I wanted to engage and connect with my young participants. Both fields share similarities with spatial theories and Children’s Geographies and helped me enter an exploration of place, power, experience, and relationships in a deeper, more grounded way.

Community-based education researchers argue that their curricular approaches can transform the way young people perceive and engage in their world. Children’s geographers use their work to “map” and describe young people’s sense of the world or their geographies. This study utilizes Children’s Geographies to explore the phenomenon of place-making through curriculum and relies on spatial theories, feminist standpoint theories and social constructivism to contextualize the research, grounding it in assumptions about positionality, learning, and knowledge. From a very practical perspective, I want to understand how teachers grapple with place-based pedagogies in traditional classrooms, how they succeed and struggle in offering thoughtful opportunities for students to learn about their world. Importantly, I want to understand how educators’ efforts in community-based education can be more transformative, challenging and meaningful for students, positively impacting their sense of place.

In following chapters, I detail specifics of the project – its contexts, observations, findings, and challenges. In Chapter 2, I describe in detail the project’s methodologies, participants, and the school and city where the research took place. Chapter 3 offers a focused curriculum study of the Second Tuesday Project, a close examination of the day-to-day curricular practices, struggles and successes of students and teachers. It also offers reflection and analysis of the project from the perspectives of teachers and students and contextualizes the project in community-based scholarship and research. In Chapter
4. I present case studies of four individual students’ geographies of home, school, and city. A cross-case analysis of all eight participating students’ geographies follows. In Chapter 5, I examine the intersections between students’ geographies and their participation in the Second Tuesday Project, describing areas where students’ geographies were transformed because of their experiences and exploring why these transformations occurred in some cases and did not in others. Finally, Chapter 6 summarizes the project, its implications for educators and researchers, and its remaining problems, issues and questions.
Chapter 2 - Research Methodology

The purpose of this study was to explore three phenomena: (1) the successes and challenges teachers and students experienced while participating in a community-based course; (2) the geographies of students in that course; and (3) the intersections between students’ geographies and their participation and learning through the course. My intent was to better understand what makes place- and community-based education meaningful and transformative to students, and to explore ways spatial theories can be applied to educational research and practice.

In this chapter, I will detail the urban context of my study - the physical, sociological, ideological, political and ecological landscapes of the city of Riverside. I will describe Jefferson Center and the study’s participating faculty and students. I will also outline research methodologies for the curriculum study, case studies of students’ geographies, and analysis of intersections between the two. I will describe how methodologies from Children’s Geographies informed and guided my data collection. Finally, I will examine my role as a researcher and my relationships with faculty, students, and the city of Riverside.

This study was conducted at Jefferson Center High School in Riverside, a large Midwestern city which is also my hometown. Though I haven’t lived there in 15 years, my decision to conduct this study in Riverside was influenced by two factors: the contacts I had with teachers in the Riverside Public School District and the convenience and flexibility provided by my supportive parents who live in Riverside and cared for my small children during the project’s long, unpredictable, and often irregular field hours. I spent 1-3 weeks of almost every month of the 2007-2008 school year in Riverside,
traveling there with my children from our home in Minnesota. I selected Jefferson Center High School because Jerry Michaels, one of the lead teachers of the course at the center of the project, is an old family friend. At the outset, he was enthusiastic about my project and presence in his classroom and was an advocate for the study throughout, facilitating my interactions with school and district administrators, his colleagues, and his students.

Riverside and Jefferson Center High School

Riverside

Riverside is a large, Midwestern city of over 300,000 people located in a metropolitan area of over two million people. The city is located on the banks of the Middlesmith River, a large, industrial river that also serves as a state border. Bluffs and plateaus surround the river, giving Riverside a very hilly topography. The city’s climate is moderate; temperatures in the summer peak at about 87 degrees Fahrenheit and winters average about 35 degrees with occasional snow and ice. Riverside’s deciduous forests are home to White-tailed deer, red and gray fox, raccoon, opossum, mink, sharp-shinned hawk, barred owl and eastern box turtle as well as a diversity of native plants, trees, and flowers. But Riverside is not known for its wildlands; a nature writer reflecting on his relocation to the city laments, “What wilderness lover would ever dream of settling deep in the Rust Belt, astride polluted rivers?” The city’s industrial history has left a legacy of toxic streams, stripped forests, and polluted air. The city’s many limestone creeks drain to the river and although they do not often provide pristine habitat for wildlife, they expose layers of Ordovician limestone untouched by the last glacial advance, providing great opportunities for fossil hunting.
The history of Riverside is intricately tied to the Middlesmith River. It was because of the river that the city grew significantly throughout the 1800-1900’s. Riverside is considered one of the U.S.’s first boomtowns and first major inland cities because of its linkages to the coasts via its waterways. Riverside did not suffer nearly as much as other cities during the Great Depression because its river-based industries were able to capitalize on cheap river transportation. Today, the city still resembles those industry-based economies; the Thompson Creek Valley (a tributary of the Middlesmith and once considered one of the most polluted waterways in the U.S.) is home to meat-packing plants, chemical factories, and rail yards.

The river also played a prominent role in the history of the city’s anti-slavery movement. As the city lay just north of the border between northern Union and southern Confederate states, it was a center for activity in the abolitionist movement and a well-traveled destination on the Underground Railroad. The city of Riverside prides itself on its citizens’ contributions to the Underground Railroad, celebrating its history with numerous historical sites and museums.

Despite this progressive history, Riverside has a rocky history of racial conflicts. Twice in the 1800s, it was home to violent racial attacks and riots against Black citizens as some White communities in Riverside considered African-Americans a threat to their job security. At that time though, the city’s wards were fairly well integrated, with neighborhoods a somewhat balanced mix of Blacks and Whites. During the industrial boom of the early 1900s though, that balance changed. New zoning laws, building codes, and subdivision regulations separating single family homes from commercial industrial areas and rental units protected home-ownership in particular neighborhoods,
economically stratifying neighborhoods. Discriminatory practices in real estate steered Blacks to lower-income Black and Appalachian White neighborhoods and Whites to predominantly upper-income White neighborhoods, further segregating the city’s neighborhoods by race and class. These practices continued through the 1960s and early 1970s leading to what is today one of the country’s top ten most segregated cities.

Today, neighborhoods throughout the city are highly stratified by race and class. What is interesting about this segregation is that the borders are often extremely close. In many areas of Riverside, only a few blocks separate low-income rental properties from million-dollar historic mansions. These delicate “fault lines,” as local sociologists term them, create a highly stratified city with glaringly apparent inequalities. Riverside sociologists argue recent racial tensions and riots in the early 2000’s were partly caused by this geographic stratification and point to data showing that more integrated cities have lower crime rates and less violence than Riverside. As of the last census, the city is 52% White and 46% Black, though most sociologists think the trend of White flight to the city’s outlying suburban communities will continue.

The current mayor is the fourth African-American mayor of the city, and the city has made many efforts in the last few years to address its racial and economic inequalities. A recent neighborhood summit addressed issues considered most important to citizens: housing foreclosures, workforce development, community collaborations, violence reduction, and greening neighborhoods. The summit was sponsored by a local university, open to the public, and had significant participation by city leaders; the mayor gave a keynote address and city council members facilitated many smaller workshops.
The demographics of the city’s public schools reflect neighborhood social stratification. Though neighborhood schools are available K-12, Riverside’s magnet schools, parochial schools, and private schools are popular, making them the first choice of families with either the income to support private education or the time to navigate the complex public magnet school enrollment system. Because of the tight “fault lines” between communities, what often happens is that lower income minority families send children to neighborhood schools and neighboring upper income and mostly White families opt for magnet, parochial, or private schools. Though most public high schools are open to all students in the city, these schools still tend to be fairly segregated by race. Jefferson Center High School, the site for this study, is no different. Though located in the diverse University area close to both White and Black neighborhoods, the school is comprised of 92% African-American students.

Jefferson Center High School
Located in the heart of Riverside, Jefferson Center High School stands amidst the rapidly developing university and hospital complexes which are direct neighbors to its north and east. The school is buffeted to the south and west by residential and commercial areas mixed with off-campus college housing and low-income neighborhoods. The nearest green space, a city park with small wooded and picnic areas is a mile away. The school is less than three miles from downtown Riverside, making it only three miles to the neighboring state and the Middlesmith River. Except for the updated university and hospital complexes, Jefferson Center High School’s immediate neighborhood is old and run-down; large brick homes turned into multi-family houses and small apartment buildings are separated by busy streets, concrete parking lots, broken
sidewalks, and oversized dumpsters. The almost one-hundred year old school is a testament to the historic life of this urban neighborhood – it is incredibly ornate; its red brick exterior supports an enormous bell tower and is trimmed with stone grotesques – described by local art historians as “stoic and heroic” figures brandishing their swords and scrolls as the “defenders and protectors of knowledge.” Typical of the older public schools in Riverside, the building shows its age. Classroom windows are covered with cardboard to mitigate indoor temperatures, many of the stone friezes are falling, and throughout the interior of the school its elaborate tiling, sculptured drinking fountains, and marble stairways are in disrepair. Artists and locals consider Jefferson Center one of Riverside’s architectural treasures; one often encounters visitors photographing the school’s exterior from the parking lot. With its boarded up windows and looming presence though, students describe the school as “the prison on the hill.”

Jefferson Center is a magnet school and draws students from throughout the city, though most come from nearby urban and lower-income neighborhoods. 78% of Jefferson Center’s 1300 students qualify for free and reduced-lunch. 92% of the student population is African-American, 4% is White. Students at Jefferson Center typically perform as well or slightly better on standardized tests than their district peers. Although not as highly regarded as other public schools in the district, Jefferson Center generally is not associated with the worst.

Jefferson Center describes itself as a “team-based magnet school dedicated to the Paideia philosophy… based on the belief that all students can be successful in a rigorous college preparatory curriculum.” Jefferson Center High School is broken up into five “school-within-a-school” programs, each with about 250 students. Each small school has
a distinct career focus: Math and Science Academy, Communications, Teaching and Technology, Human Services, and the Zoo Academy, co-taught with educators from the nearby Riverside Zoo. Students are enrolled in one of the five programs throughout their high school career for core academic and program-related classes. Each program has a program facilitator who also teaches half-time. Programs are organized into core curricular teams of teachers who work exclusively with students from that program. For example, in the Human Services Program, the 11th and 12th grade curricular team is made up of the Math, Science, English and Social Studies teachers; these four faculty teach all 11th and 12th graders in the program. Students across the Jefferson Center campus share courses in foreign languages, art, music, and physical education.

The focus of this study was the Human Services Program and more specifically, its 12th grade Human Services Course. Taught jointly by the English and Social Studies teachers, the class was created around a community-based research and service project called the Second Tuesday Project (STP). Students were paired with community social and environmental organizations and through field experiences, academic research, and field-based interviews, they wrote research papers and gave presentations focusing on a social or environmental issue in the community and proposed viable solutions to the problem. I will describe the project and curriculum in more detail in Chapter 3.

Participants

English teacher Sandra Patterson and Social Studies teacher Jerry Michaels co-taught the Human Services 12th grade course. Michaels was an old family friend of mine and an invaluable resource helping me gain access to the school and negotiate district and administrative research requirements. Michaels’ and his co-teacher, Sandra Patterson’s
classrooms were selected because of their association with the Second Tuesday Project and importantly, their willingness to be part of this study. Michaels and Patterson are White, middle-upper class, and live in suburban White neighborhoods far from Jefferson Center. Both are veteran teachers in their late 50s and have been teaching at Jefferson Center over 10 years.

The 2007-2008 school year was a busy one for Michaels and Patterson. Besides the Human Services Course, they both had a full course load of English and Social Studies classes for the 11th and 12th grade Human Services students. Michaels was also the advisor of Student Government; his Jefferson Center student representatives were active in school leadership and in district and statewide meetings and workshops. As a 12th grade English teacher, Patterson was responsible for coordinating the completion of senior writing portfolios as part of a district-wide graduation requirement. This task required a great deal of effort on the part of the students and Patterson to edit and revise papers from throughout their high school career in preparation for portfolio submission.

Of the 38 students in the 12th grade Human Services course, only one is Hispanic, the rest are African-American. As part of this study, eight students participated in interviews and small focus group sessions, their participation was entirely voluntary. Early in the school year I introduced my project to all 12th grade Human Services students and asked for volunteers; eight students were willing to participate and I welcomed all of them. All of the students were African-American and ranged in age from 17-19. Because seven students were young women, I sought out additional young men from the Human Services course to participate but all had conflicts with work, sports, or other after-school activities.
Data Collection

How do young people construct a sense of place? What is the role of place-based curriculum in the process of place-making? In order to explore these questions, I needed to understand the unique lived experiences, narratives, and perspectives of individual young people. Additionally, I needed to study the way a place-based curriculum operates in a real classroom with teachers and students who are willing to reflect upon their experiences as participants and learners. I was interested in the particular ways young people’s changing ideas of place interact with the concrete experience of place-based education. To do this, I conducted a focused curriculum study of the community-based Human Services course. I also conducted case studies of eight individual high school students during their participation in the Human Services course.

I was interested in processes, interactions, and dynamics that occur within a classroom and within learners themselves. I was interested in “the nature of phenomena” (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005, p. 18) - specifically place-making - and the role of place-based curriculum in that process. I wanted to know the “how’s” and “what’s” of these issues, as in “What is going on here?” (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative research methodologies were the most appropriate to my interests because of their emphasis on the unique lived experiences of individuals and the way individuals make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 1998).

There were two strands to my qualitative data collection, the curriculum study and the students’ geographies. To study the Human Services course curriculum, I relied upon participant-observation, collection of curricular materials, and interviews with faculty, students, and administrators.
Curriculum Study Methodologies

As a participant-observer, I spent time in the Human Services wing of Jefferson Center during the school day and sat in on Michaels or Patterson’s Human Services class in the mornings. I attended informal meetings between Michaels and Patterson before class started and more formal Human Services faculty meetings. At the beginning of the school year, I observed the class from the wings, sitting off to the side or in the back of the room. Some of the curriculum early in the school year revolved around defining and explaining community-based research - developing questions and identifying information sources. Because my study was also a community-based research project, Michaels and Patterson asked that I officially introduce myself to the class by leading a mini-workshop describing my research and helping students begin to organize their own. Thus, aside from simply observing class, I participated as a guest-speaker on two occasions. The first, explaining my presence and research in the Human Services classroom, and the second, facilitating a workshop on asking good research questions (see Appendix A for lesson plans).

After these initial interactions, I became more involved in the day-to-day life of the classrooms. I talked with students informally before, after, and during class about their work, assignments, and projects. I accompanied groups of students to the computer lab and joined in small groups for mini-discussions or activities.

I took two-column notes while in class; one column listed classroom activities chronologically, and the other noted my questions and reflections about what was going on. At the end of the day, I transcribed these notes into more succinct and organized field notes. Field notes from the classroom and faculty meetings were useful in understanding the day-to-day activities of students and teachers involved in the course. This helped me
later to describe curricular activities, student participation, and teacher planning and organizational activities. Participant-observations also helped me establish a rapport with students which I believe was central to their willingness to participate in the project.

In addition to observing and participating in class, I collected copies of classroom materials. This included initial course descriptions and goals, assignments, and handouts for parents, students, and participating organizations. From participating students, I copied their final research papers and PowerPoint presentations. All of these materials helped me understand the work students produced as well as the formal documents faculty used to promote and explain the course to participants and supporters.

Throughout the school year, I conducted formal and informal interviews with faculty. These included quick discussions after class about how teachers felt the course was going or brief questions for clarity about the context or meaning of what was going on. I also conducted more focused and formal interviews with both Michaels and Patterson about their curricular goals, end of year reflections, and students’ course participation and learning outcomes. In formal interviews with Tom Spillings, the Human Services program facilitator, we discussed similar issues: Human Services Course curriculum, planning, and outcomes.

In student interviews related to the curriculum study, we discussed their experiences at field sites and in the classroom, their engagement with curriculum, their research projects, and their feelings about classroom learning.

Collectively, interviews helped me understand the day-to-day experiences of those involved with the Human Services Course, and the way participants interpreted the meaning of the course for their education, teaching, or lives. All interviews were audio
recorded and transcribed for later data analysis. During interviews I took notes to guide further questioning, data collection, or analysis.

**Students’ Geographies**

Case study methodology allows a researcher to identify a system, bounded in space and time, that will be explored through multiple forms of data collection like interviews, participant observations, and physical artifacts (Creswell, 1998). The “case,” a bounded system, can be a program, an event, or a person. Merriam (1998) explains,

> A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation (p.19).

Merriam describes case studies as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic; particularistic because they focus on a small-scale, specific system or phenomenon and descriptive because their end product is a rich, detailed account of the case, its context, and its meanings. Case studies are heuristic because the end product can explain, summarize, or evaluate the context of the case or phenomenon in previously unexplored ways. Multiple cases studied in conjunction become a collective case study and enable the researcher to compare across cases common themes and meanings (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998).

My research lends itself well to the methods of collective case study research because my focus is on the process of place-making for individual students who are bound by their shared participation in the Second Tuesday Project.

Case study research does not have scripted research and data collection techniques; instead it relies on diverse approaches to understanding phenomenon. For constructing case studies of participating students, I used interviews and focus group sessions to explore issues of place with students. I conducted interviews with students
about their geographies after they had participated in a few focus group sessions, that way I knew something about places of importance in their day-to-day lives prior to talking with them individually. I used the interviews to follow up on issues students had discussed during focus group sessions or to ask for clarity or expansion on issues they briefly described. We talked about their neighborhoods, perceptions of the city, and places they found important and meaningful in their lives. We often talked about students’ friends and family and how relationships contributed to their perceptions and experiences of places. Depending on the student, we discussed their jobs, extracurricular activities, and goals after graduation. We also discussed their Second Tuesday Project experiences and the degree to which those experiences influenced students’ views of their communities and city.

Initially, I anticipated using photography as a way of engaging participating students with ideas of place. This is a very common methodology in Children’s Geographies (H. Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 1998; Tapsell, Tunstall, House, Whomsley, & Macnaghten, 2001; Weller, 2006; Wridt, 2004) as it has been found to help elicit young people’s often abstract ideas about place by using concrete two-dimensional photographs as talking points (H. Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 1998). I enthusiastically purchased digital cameras and sent students out to photograph places in their lives that were meaningful, interesting, or problematic. Over the next few days, the task became a chore for students who kept forgetting to take cameras with them, and then it became a frustration as cameras (cheap ones) were not taking photos as easily and clearly as students and I had hoped. I quickly found in focus group sessions though that this group
of students had no trouble at all discussing abstract ideas of place and meaning and so we moved on, leaving the cameras behind.

Focus group sessions were exciting. I met with students after school in either Patterson’s or Spilling’s classroom ensuring it was empty of teachers and other students. One of my favorite grocery stores to visit in Riverside is Trader Joe’s and before focus group sessions I stocked up on snacks for students. Not the typical brands of products found in most grocery stores, the snacks always created a buzz as students had a lot to say about what I brought, what they liked, and what they had seen before (two students had jobs at local grocery stores that carried similar foods). Students disliked hummus but loved peanut-butter pretzels. Chocolate covered sandwich cookies were divine and the individual cheeses wrapped in wax were a favorite (at our last focus group session I brought each student their own large pack as a thank you). Food helped create a sense of community as the students and I passed snacks around, distributed cheese and crackers, scrambled over the last of the cookies, and playfully argued about who most needed caffeinated iced tea.

Children’s geographers have found that group discussions, interviews, and hands-on activities offer practical ways for children to access and talk about abstract concepts like place and meaning (H. Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 1998; Tapsell et al., 2001). In this study, I found hands-on activities gave students a clear sense of purpose and focus at our meetings and provided concrete, thought-provoking prompts for engaging discussions. The progression of activities was fluid as students who didn’t attend a session would catch up on activities they missed and I would frequently direct discussion to previous meeting’s activities and conversations for clarity and follow up. I will
describe in detail three core activities: mapping, place descriptors, and Riverside brochures.

**Mapping.**

My first formal meeting with participating students as part of a focus group session was in January. During the initial workshop, students were asked to “map” important and meaningful places in their lives. Using mapping is a common research technique in cultural geography as it introduces concepts relevant to participants’ environmental autobiography (Wridt, 2004). Maps allowed students to organize and describe important, meaningful and interesting places on a two dimensional surface. Because students controlled the spatial organization and scale of their maps, maps reflected the mapmaker’s unique sense of the world. Participants’ maps varied a great deal in terms of scale; some included far away countries students wanted to visit and others were more intimate describing students’ neighborhood street corners and gas stations (see Appendix B). Others were sweeping maps of the city including shopping centers, relatives’ homes, job sites, and school. Each student presented and described their map to the group when completed. The maps were useful to introduce the idea of place in our conversations, help me get to know the students, and form a baseline for identifying important, meaningful, or problematic places in participants’ lives.

**Place descriptors.**

Roughly following a protocol developed by Matthews et.al. (1998) based on associating meanings with places, I took the places students included in their maps and wrote each in bold lettering on a poster and hung them around the room. These included places like home, school, work, Michael’s classroom, the school bus, and one’s
neighborhood. I then gave students stickers with feelings and emotions like happy, sad, afraid, excluded, included, safe and powerful written on them. Students moved around the room attaching the emotions to the places and writing different emotions on blank stickers where they felt I had not provided the appropriate emotions. They also made new posters for important places I had missed like “best friend’s house” and “the softball field.” The activity prompted a great deal of discussion about students’ differing experiences and perspectives of shared places. It also highlighted places of importance that we had missed when students encountered familiar emotions but had to create a poster for its appropriate place-location.

_Riverside brochures._

To initiate discussions about how participants view the city of Riverside, I asked them to create a brochure that described various aspects of the city. This was a short exercise, only taking about 20 minutes. Students were given a blank brochure to write or draw on and were guided by headings asking them to describe or illustrate, (1) the city’s scenery (what it looks like), (2) the people, (3) the Riverside teenager experience, (4) the land and natural environment, (5) Riverside neighborhoods, (6) social conditions (race relations, poverty, housing, social services, violence, drugs), (7) places to go in Riverside, (8) the experts (why do you know so much about Riverside?), and (9) sources (how do you know so much about Riverside, i.e. personal experience, family history, school, work, media) (see Appendix C). This activity worked well getting students to quickly comment on a number of different topics and allowed me to ask more focused follow-up questions like “Why do you think it looks that way?” or “Do you think everyone views the neighborhoods like that?” The activity also allowed me to make comparisons across
participants and prompted students to discuss differing perspectives. The brochure was also helpful in constructing participants’ case studies as it summarized some of their more general perceptions about the city.

Focus group sessions were a mix of socializing and eating, focused hands-on activities and group discussions. Activities helped ground our discussions; I could return to specific features of students’ maps, brochures, or word associations to ask specific questions, make comparisons, or ask students to describe features in more detail. Overall, participants were very engaged with the topics and activities, no one ever left early or distanced themselves from the group or the task at hand. In fact, we usually felt short on time and air space; I tried to facilitate discussions as judiciously as possible allowing everyone time to speak but we always ran out of time. All focus group sessions were audio recorded and later transcribed.

I collected all materials (brochures, maps) students created as part of the focus group sessions. These documents helped me formulate general questions for upcoming group discussions and specific questions for individual student interviews.

Data Analysis

The inductive nature of qualitative research necessitates data analysis that is ongoing and recursive (Merriam, 1998; Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). Like many researchers, my data analysis was so integrated with data collection and the entire research process that it is difficult to describe it in isolation (Creswell, 1998; Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). From the first moment I stepped foot in Jefferson Center, during my first meeting with faculty, and mid-way through our first group focus session, I was reviewing, questioning, and analyzing what I had
observed and heard. From those moments forward, I began connecting every new piece of data to what had come before, making connections, finding themes, bundling threads of information in an effort to understand the processes that were happening for teachers and students as they participated in the Second Tuesday Project and went on about their lives in Riverside. When I transcribed an interview or focus group session, I interrupted my transcription numerous times to write additional notes and questions about the data. Once I had a hard copy of transcriptions, I returned to them again and again with multi-colored pens and pencils identifying themes, ideas, and issues I could bring to my next interview, observation, or focus group session. I returned to old and new literature to look for other scholars’ insights regarding similar issues and for new ways of interpreting the data I had.

By necessity, most definitions of qualitative research analysis reflect these abstract and fluid approaches, “…the analysis of qualitative data is inductive, grounded in particular pieces of data that are sorted and interrelated in order to understand the dimensions and dynamics of some phenomenon as it is enacted by intentional social actors in some time and place” (Dyson and Genishi, 2005, p.83). Merriam (1998) argues that appropriate qualitative data analysis begins the moment the first data is collected with the process of reading over data, reflecting on it through memos and researcher journals, and beginning initial identification of categories and themes relevant to the research question that are apparent in the data. This was certainly the case in my study. Throughout my year in the field and a year of analysis and writing, I revisited, re-read, and re-thought these materials. I brainstormed themes and issues that seemed important (i.e. race, segregated neighborhoods, or the importance of quality field placements) and
tried to organize them into webs that would help me link issues to others that were related (i.e. identity, Riverside history, or the macro-politics of education funding).

I conducted within-case analysis (Merriam, 1998) to holistically describe each student’s process of place-making and experiences as a learner in a place-based classroom. In these cases (Chapter 4), a closer look at the geographies of Briana, Dana, Adam, and Kayla-Jean helped me focus acutely on one student’s experiences and perceptions of place in order to understand the central issues and themes shaping their individual geographies.

I also conducted cross-case analyses of the cases (Chapter 4) in order to more generally explain and describe some of the themes impacting participants’ lives, even though individual contexts varied (Merriam, 1998). Cross case analysis allowed me to arrive at “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake, 1995) or “working hypotheses” (Merriam, 1998, p. 209). I identified issues common to all participants regarding the phenomenon of place-making. Examples included the importance of schooling, the centrality of race, the presence of violence, and the significance of safe, inclusive places in participants’ geographies.

More specifically, I used the content analysis and the constant comparison methods (Merriam, 1998) in my data analysis. I analyzed documents (transcripts, focus group materials, field notes) looking for ideas and patterns of meaning that could be coded and organized into broader categories or themes. Merriam writes that content analysis in qualitative research emphasizes the communication of meaning; the researcher identifies units of data that speak to the research questions either directly or indirectly. The constant comparison method relies on the identification of meaningful categories that
are then compared to other pieces of data to look for coherence or dissonance. This was a useful approach in constructing my cross-case analysis; I looked for similar trends and distinct approaches in students’ place-making in order to more generally understand teens’ geographies of Riverside.

I anticipated answering my third research question regarding the interactions between community-based curriculum and young people’s geographies exclusively through data analysis. I felt I would need to identify subtle connections between classroom observations, interview transcripts, and focus group materials. I felt I would be looking for subtle indicators that there was something going on in young people’s geographies related to their Second Tuesday Project participation. To some extent, this was the case. I found that students’ final Second Tuesday Project papers and presentations occasionally demonstrated that something had changed in the way students’ viewed or reflected on their communities; a student might mention that they found an issue particularly revealing or transformative and that it allowed them to see things differently. I also found relevant data through analysis of information that was not present in my transcripts. In advanced studies of my cross-case analysis (Ch. 4), it became apparent that the absence of the STP from students’ collective geographies was significant (Ch. 5).

But more often then not, once students understood my interests based on their participation in the focus group sessions, they were quite able to answer very direct questions about their geographies and the Second Tuesday Project. In large group discussions and individual interviews, I posed questions to students like, “tell me if and how your experiences in the Second Tuesday Project have shaped your experiences and
perception of Riverside.” Students drew upon discussions we had previously about their brochures or maps and were able to speak directly to the question. Answers were either a very clear, “This is how it has changed my view…” or “This is why it hasn’t changed anything…” I was able to take students’ direct responses and triangulate them with data from their papers and presentations, other focus group comments, or faculty observations and make a case for the relationships I identified and described (Chapter 5). For this third research question about the interactions between place-based education and students’ geographies, data analysis was surprisingly straightforward.

Although Gruenewald’s (2003) five dimensions of place did not directly find a place in my final reporting of data and conclusions, they were extremely useful in my data analysis. Trying to achieve a deeper level of understanding about the geographic data (maps, brochures, stories, perceptions, experiences, frustrations) I gathered from participants, I created graphic organizers focused on the perceptual, social, ideological, political, and ecological dimensions of participants’ geographies. I then entered into the organizers various issues or comments participants made that related to these dimensions. This analysis helped me identify broader structures like social stratification, racism, and economies of transport that were shaping participants’ geographies. I felt that this approach helped both broaden my analysis by encouraging me to contextualize the data on wider structural scales and also focus my analysis by identifying specific stories, comments, or contributions that were directly related to the dimensions of place and space I wanted to examine. These dimensions helped me make concrete the very abstract task of interpreting a young person’s sense of place.
Although I did not formally share findings with participants, through my continual presence at Jefferson Center during the school year, I structured discussions, interviews, and focus group sessions in ways that allowed me to review observations, questions, and findings I was making through ongoing data analysis by member checking (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). For example, on my second visit to Jefferson Center, I returned to teachers with questions like, “On my first visit, you mentioned you had very little in place in terms of curriculum. How has the planning been going thus far?” And, during my second visit with my focus group, I was able to return to students for clarification on initial trends I identified, “It seems like no one had much to say about natural areas in Riverside, can you tell me more about that?” I felt that by posing questions to participants based on earlier observations and data analysis, I was able to share with participants aspects of their experiences I was noticing and question these issues directly, thus strengthening the trustworthiness and reliability of the project.

I utilized many tools in my data collection and analysis. Using traditional qualitative methods like participant-observation and interviews, Children’s Geographies’ methods like mapping and place-meaning association, and graphic organizers like brochures from my experiences as a classroom teacher, I drew upon a wide range of methods and approaches to describe the classroom practice of community-based education, the place-making experiences and perspectives of young people, and the interactions between the two phenomena. Children’s geographer Hemming (2008) argues that “mixing qualitative methods can be beneficial for gaining deeper and more complex understandings of social processes.” In this study, multiple approaches to
collecting and analyzing data helped me interact with participants in a variety of ways and make meaning from very complex and abstract phenomena.

_Researcher Positionality_

Though Hemming (2008) recommends mixed methodological approaches, he also cautions that using mixed methods can result in a “myriad of shifting power relations between the adult researcher and the child participant” (2008, p. 152). Hemming suggests “that a reflexive approach is required in order to deal with the challenges of combining different methodological approaches” (2008, p. 152). Dyson and Genishi (2005) also emphasize the significance of researcher’s positionality in their approach to qualitative data analysis, pointing out that, “…the effort to understand others’ understandings is mediated by the researcher’s own professional, personal, and collective knowledge and experiences” (2005, p. 83).

Feminist researchers utilize standpoint theories to understand and describe their own perspectives and biases in relation to their research participants. This process can lead to a personal sense of connection to participants and a collaborative approach to research. Sprague (2005) explains,

Feminist researchers have attempted to address problems of objectification of research subjects through building on their connections with those they research: being more personal than professional, and drawing on their own emotional reactions and biographies as resources for interpreting data (2005, p. 161).

Because I was interested in place and spatial contexts, I utilized similarities between my environmental biography (as a classroom teacher, a Riverside Public Schools graduate, a former Lincoln Heights resident) to make personal connections with participants. For example, when students discussed rides at Riverside’s Four Towers Amusement Park, I
added my own favorite (or most feared) roller coasters there as well. When teachers lamented the amount of paperwork they had to complete at the end of the year, I commented, “I remember the stress of this time of year, how is it going?” These contributions helped build rapport between myself, faculty, and students. I believe it made our relationships more comfortable and positive. The fact that both teachers and students made time for interviews and focus group sessions throughout the school year and especially during their final days and weeks of school was a testament to our affirming relationship and the positive way in which they regarded their participation in this study.

Because this study was centered on issues of place, experience, and perspective, it is important to pre-empt the study’s findings and analysis with details from my own environmental biography, especially as it relates to the city of Riverside. I was born and raised in Riverside and attended public schools there. I grew up in Lincoln Heights, a low-middle income, planned integrated neighborhood established in the 1950s and 1960s by its racially diverse residents to directly confront real estate discrimination, property devaluing, and “White flight” from the neighborhood located approximately 10 miles from downtown Riverside. I come from a White, middle class family; although my parents were discreet about their politics, they were decidedly liberal and progressive. Their decision to live in Lincoln Heights was deliberate, they wanted an integrated (both racially and socio-economically) neighborhood to raise their children. When we discussed race at home, I remember my parents simply saying it was important that we grow up around diverse groups of people and that having friends, neighbors and classmates different than you was very important.
My mother still recounts how her Catholic family protested strongly when she enrolled my older sister in a public school kindergarten. The typical argument in support of Catholic schools was, “If you send her to St. Margaret’s she will get to be with little girls just like her!” For my parents, this was their central argument against the Catholic schools.

My parents bused my three sisters and me to a diverse, public magnet school located in a very poor, mostly African-American neighborhood in downtown Riverside. We went to elementary school with students from all over the city, with at least 50% of the students coming directly from the surrounding neighborhood. The school provided students with a great deal of cultural, racial, and socioeconomic diversity. Our diverse and progressive teachers did not barricade themselves inside school walls, I remember walking with my teachers and classmates through nearby neighborhoods as a 2nd grader to swim at the local YMCA and shop for vegetables at a historic downtown market.

My sisters and I spent family weekends and vacations in the woods and mountains; my mother is a talented gardener committed to the use of organic methods and native plants. My father is a pro at catching salamanders and crawdads and taught us to ice skate on frozen limestone creeks. We grew up hiking in the Appalachian Mountains, swimming in their wild rivers, canoeing local tributaries of the Middlesmith, and attending rustic summer nature camps. My family was decidedly eco-conscious, environmentally friendly, and in love with the outdoors.

My high school, Maple Ridge was also a public magnet school; it emphasized rigorous academics and required students to pass an entrance exam. Located only three miles from Jefferson Center it was in a similarly old, impoverished, and predominantly
African-American neighborhood. My high school was more diverse than Jefferson Center but enrolled a majority of White students. Socially, the school was racially stratified though we prided ourselves on our progressive diversity; the six years I attended, our elected class officers were always those who ran as a diverse two-person ticket, one Black student, one White. Because both of my schools were magnet schools, I had friends from neighborhoods throughout Riverside.

Riverside’s racial and socioeconomic stratifications were apparent in relationships between Maple Ridge’s students and the surrounding community. I remember Black neighborhood children hiding in the woods with BB guns shooting at my mostly White soccer team during practice after school. Some of those same neighborhood children broke into cars in the student parking lot stealing school bags and radios. Once, when I was walking the four blocks from the city bus stop to school, a White friend of mine and I were accosted by a Black teen criticizing my friend’s appearance (he was wearing shiny green “soccer shorts” on a cool fall day). She pushed him around and threatened him with a knife until a friend pulled her away. At a later meeting with our high school principal and the school police officer, they told us that she was a student at Jefferson Center.

I remember playing high school basketball against Jefferson Center - I had mixed feelings about the school - I liked knowing our family friend Jerry Michaels was a teacher there (he often came to see our games) but the Jefferson Center team had a reputation for playing rough. Jefferson Center’s basketball team was all African-American, not integrated like mine. I found this fact, combined with their aggressive ball playing, extremely intimidating.
I graduated high school with a small Lincoln Heights neighborhood scholarship awarded for an essay I wrote on the benefits of growing up in an interracial neighborhood but race in Riverside remained tenuous and unresolved for me. I grew up in racially and economically diverse schools and neighborhoods with friends from all over the city, but was still intimidated by some mostly African-American neighborhoods and high schools (like Jefferson Center). It was an interesting and insightful opportunity for me to return to Riverside and conduct my research at Jefferson Center. I was able to revisit high school stereotypes about Jefferson Center and dissolve many of my long-held notions of the school as being tough, rough, aggressive, and intimidating. In fact, it was anything but those things. Jefferson Center has become a place I now associate with a dynamic and bright group of students and a committed faculty struggling with the typical ups and downs of any urban high school. Clearly, my own geography of Riverside has changed through this project.

My environmental biography and connections to Riverside made my experiences as a researcher more complex, emotional, and transformative. They helped me relate to participants in familiar ways: the people in Riverside talk like I do, they represent a diversity I grew up with, and the places they inhabit - though they mean different things to all of us - share some similar significance. Returning home for this project was a very humbling and inspiring endeavor. I drew upon my environmental biography to make connections with faculty and students, understand some of the more subtle assumptions and stereotypes suggested by participants, and analyze data in a richer way because of my own history in Riverside. I will revisit some of these issues in my conclusion, Chapter 6.
In the next sections, I will discuss my relationships with participating faculty and students and the role my environmental biography played in those relationships.

**Faculty Relationships**

My first day on site at Jefferson Center to meet with Michaels and Parker, I was eight months pregnant. The security guard, Mrs. Jackson, at the school’s entrance welcomed me heartily and reluctantly sent me up to Michaels’ room on the third floor after much convincing on my part that I would be just fine taking the stairs. Mrs. Jackson and I formed a very friendly relationship over the course of the year; her adult daughter was hospitalized during the school year and with my husband studying medicine, we spoke often about hospitals, doctors, and patient care. Her kind and friendly welcome set a positive tone for my subsequent interactions at the school; my long-held stereotypes of Jefferson Center were dismissed at its door.

Since I was anywhere from 15-30 years younger than the Human Services core faculty, our relationships initially resembled that of veteran and student teachers. I had a lot of very basic questions and observations about the day-to-day logistics and practices of the program and faculty patiently indulged me in answering them. Our relationships progressed to become more collaborative as they later requested my help in organizing mini-workshops and we had more in-depth discussions about theory and practice.

Prior to my first meeting with Human Services faculty, Michaels described my project to teachers to gauge their interest and willingness to participate in the study. Patterson quickly realized she and I had an additional connection, her daughter and I both attended Maple Ridge High School and had worked together as editors of the school newspaper. This fact, along with my family’s relationship to Michaels, made for very
friendly and supportive relationships between the teachers and me. Though I was the age of their adult children, Michaels and Patterson were both veteran teachers used to working with younger faculty. Mostly, they treated me like a young teacher, patiently answering the myriad of questions I had, tolerating my presence in class, helping me navigate administrators, parking, and the school hallways as they would a novice colleague.

Being a mother of one and a soon-to-be mother of two also helped establish friendly relationships with faculty. My pregnancy offered an immediate informal intimacy with faculty and administration (especially women and parents), who wanted to know more about my pregnancy, family, and eventually my purpose for being at Jefferson Center. Faculty seemed very sympathetic to my efforts and made significant gestures to help me with the study. For example, when the first group of interested students came forward, Patterson volunteered a great deal of time to review the list of students with me. She shared her thoughts on the students, gave me her recommendation as to how successful they would be as participants, commented on their personalities, reliability, maturity, and academic success. Although I explained I was accepting any and all students who were interested and able to participate, she remained concerned that I have a positive, productive, and stress-free experience with Jefferson Center students.

In addition, my mini-workshop on community-based research and research questions and planning helped me establish a knowledgeable and legitimate identity with faculty. After the lessons, both Michaels and Patterson seemed somewhat surprised and responded positively; Michaels was encouraged that I hadn’t lost touch with my instructional skills commenting, “You’ve still got it!” And Patterson was enthusiastic
about my tone, content, and organization, urging me to return to classroom teaching.

After the mini-workshop, Michaels and Patterson would occasionally defer to me in curricular planning sessions, asking for support and assistance in different activities. I tried to remain helpful and supportive of curricular planning efforts without being directive. By the end of the year when planning became more stressful and tense, this aspect of our relationship disappeared.

In fact, it seemed the more I observed classes and asked questions about curriculum and planning, the more reticent Patterson and Michaels became. As the year progressed, they apologized more for their disorganization, made excuses about student motivation and behavior, and frequently described how administrators and other faculty created stressors and barriers to their success. I believe that as the stressors of the end of the year massed and I was still present asking for interviews, access to students, and the use of their classrooms, the teachers became weary of my presence. Awkwardly, I was present for a few of Michaels’ and Patterson’s heated interactions before class, when they were trying to juggle many tasks and their communication about curricular planning was unsuccessful. They argued over planning efforts, classroom organization, student behavior, and academic performance. Michaels and Patterson began to ask me to help out with small tasks and errands: making copies, making phone calls, substituting classes, or chaperoning field trips. I tried to balance these requests with my research goals, and helped out when I felt it wouldn’t conflict with research opportunities or jeopardize the rapport I had established with students and faculty.

At the end of the year, during Michaels’ and Patterson’s concluding interviews (which occurred after seniors had graduated and their course loads were significantly
diminished) the teachers were as helpful, reflective, and patient as ever. They retained their supportive stances, indulging me in lengthy interviews and patient responses. Both were concerned that I “got what [I] needed” from the study.

My connections to Michaels and Patterson outside the classroom influenced their initial level of support and tolerance for my project and presence. It was through repeated discussions about theory and practice and mini-workshops that I established some authority as a teacher and researcher. Based on our shared history and my professional experience they knew I was committed to public education and was sympathetic to their efforts. In the end, our relationships remained very supportive, friendly and familiar.

Student Relationships

Throughout this study and report, I utilize a variety of terms for my teenage participants: students, teens, young people, adolescents, and participants. I utilize “students” most frequently because it references the spatial politics of the study; the project was centered around and took place entirely within the walls and spaces of a school. There, my teenage participants inhabited the role of “students.” As an adult with some authority, I was most often lumped in with those adults inhabiting the role of “teachers.” I tried to minimize the political dynamics of this position in my study by making it clear that I did not have the power to distribute academic rewards or punishments for any level of participation (no extra credit, academic accolades, or detentions). I also avoided any overt judgment of students’ contributions to the study through their participation in focus group sessions or interviews. Still, I think students’ quickly understood the types of information I was most interested in based on our
activities and my follow-up questions. Nevertheless, I tried to avoid being judgmental, approving, or disapproving in our interactions.

Because I initially interacted with students through the research mini-workshop in class, I was viewed as an adult with some authority, located somewhere in the middle of the power spectrum between teachers and students. When I was in the classroom with teachers and students, students and faculty referred to me as Mrs. Cole. In focus group sessions and before and after class, participating students called me Ms. Anna or just Anna.

My first day in the classroom with students, Michaels introduced me by explaining that I grew up with his children and was the same age as his son, Tim. He joked to students about photos he had reluctantly left at home of Tim and I as babies swimming naked in a baby pool. The students and I responded with laughter (mine, mostly embarrassed). He explained I was working on my doctorate, doing a community-based research project and left the rest for me to explain. To the students, I explained that I was a former high school teacher, grew up in Riverside’s Lincoln Heights neighborhood and graduated from Maple Ridge High School. Michaels is a well-respected teacher, students consider him fair, trustworthy, personable and enthusiastic. I think this light, humorous and warm introduction helped me initially break the ice with students. They respected Michaels and I think when they saw I was worthy of and could take one of his embarrassing jokes, I received a gracious extension of some of the respect Michaels had earned from the students.

Interacting with students before and after class, I inquired about their assignments or upcoming school activities (dances, basketball games, holidays). As the focus group
sessions and interviews got up and running, students became more familiar with my presence and would engage me when I saw them, sharing stories, showing me papers, talking about after-school activities. I occasionally became the de facto responsible adult accompanying students to the computer lab during class time while Michaels or Patterson remained in their classroom. There I would roam between the computer desks, helping students with online research, asking them about assignments. These interactions helped me establish some rapport with the group but not much authority; I was someone who understood a little about online search engines, could help with interpreting academic papers, but would not directly challenge students who were not on task.

In focus group sessions, I participated in activities and shared my own stories of Riverside. I think my connection to the Lincoln Heights neighborhood helped build rapport with students. It is a lower-middle class diverse neighborhood and students’ perceptions about it were fairly neutral. Briana, who also lived in Lincoln Heights described it as violent and dangerous; I think this perception helped establish my identity with students as decidedly “urban.”

I was careful that participating students’ never felt judged or criticized for their contributions. I believe that students considered this project’s interviews and focus group sessions positive opportunities to share their expertise on life in Riverside, to complain about opportunities for teens in the city, and to socialize, eat, and hang out after school in a safe, productive environment. At most focus group sessions, anywhere from one to three students was absent but those missing always made an effort to see me in school the next day, follow up on activities, and attend the next session. Students went out of their way to change work schedules, skip athletic practices, and arrange after-school rides in
order to attend focus group sessions. With no incentive offered other than free food and the experience of being part of a study, I interpreted this effort to participate as a positive sign about my relationship with the students and their interest and engagement with the project.

During focus group sessions, students confidently assumed roles of knowledgeable informants and advisors. For example, when describing the map of her life, Briana explained, “I don’t go to Club Nuevo because every time I do somebody fights… So stay away from there. And this one [block] I’m kind of scared - I gave the definition of “trap house” in case you didn’t know what it was.” On her map, she had written, “Trap House – a place where people buy, sell and use drugs.” Like expert advisors, students gave me tips on good restaurants, the best shopping malls, the quickest bus routes, and the best time of day to sit at Middlesmith River overlooks.

Teens in the study also took the initiative to make our relationship more friendly and personal. The first day I had a formal interview with the program facilitator Spillings, I must have worn clothing a little more stylish and dressy than usual because once students found out what I was up to after school, they gave me a very hard time and had a good laugh about how I was “all dressed up” to interview Mr. Spillings. Students inquired about my children, invited me to chaperone prom, and hassled me about my reluctance to embrace text messaging as my primary mode of communication.

At the project’s conclusion, I asked students about their participation in the study and the significance of our racial differences. Most were dismissive, “I have White friends so it doesn’t bother me” or “I don’t look at anybody because of their color, I just look at people as a person.” Candace highlighted the very important fact that the students
were the ones doing me a favor. When asked about racial differences and the fact that I was White, she said, “It didn't effect me, I don't see the difference, I've been exposed to and worked with people from other races all my life - you are just another person working on a research project and we are just here helping you out.” Dana, who has a White step-father, explained that she works a lot with other folks who are White so it didn’t matter but she wasn’t sure about her classmates; when I asked if our racial differences influenced her participation, she said, “Not to me, probably to other people.” Kayla-Jean proposed a different cultural classification for me that made us more related, “I don't look at you like you are White, you are urban to me, you are Black in my eyes - I can talk to you …seriously that's how I look at you.”

For these students, my position as a White researcher/teacher (with limited power) working with African-American students was not unusual. In the Human Services Program, all core faculty (English, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science) were White. Michaels’ reputation as a respected teacher and his warm, personal introduction of me to students helped me establish a positive rapport with participating students. In the end, I believe my enthusiastic approach to the students and the study, paired with their interest in the project and acceptance of me, made for a very collegial, cooperative, and fun research environment. To some extent, I think our shared “urban” experiences of Riverside helped foster an open, supportive environment for research where students were excited and enthused to “help me out” with their time, knowledge, and experience.

The interdisciplinary questions about place guiding this study necessitated a mixed methodological approach to data collection and analysis. I utilized research methods from traditional qualitative research, Children’s Geographies, and my
experiences as a classroom teacher in order to understand the challenges of instituting place-based pedagogies in the classroom, adolescents’ geographies, and the ways place-based curriculum influences young people’s sense of place. My shared geography and history with the study’s participants helped me gain access to the classroom, build rapport with teachers and administrators, and foster positive relationships with students.

But, I have made assumptions and conclusions about participants’ experiences of place that an outsider with a more dissimilar geography of Riverside may have interpreted differently. For example, I collected no data regarding students’ socioeconomic status but I certainly made conclusions about them based on the neighborhoods students came from. Because I am familiar with the general socioeconomic status of Riverside’s neighborhoods, these conclusions about students’ financial situation may have interfered with the ways I understood and interpreted their geographies. Thus, it was important for me to closely consider my own environmental biography in context with this study, my relationships with participants, and my work collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting data. I will revisit these issues in upcoming chapters, looking carefully at the way my researcher identity, positionality, and geography contributed to my interpretations and findings.
Chapter 3 - Curriculum Study

Gruenewald (2003) writes that the primary goal of place-conscious education is “to enlist teachers and students in the firsthand experience of local life and in the political process of understanding and shaping what happens there” (2003, p. 620). The purpose of this chapter is to explore those processes in the classroom – to answer my first research question: how do students and faculty experience and grapple with the opportunities, challenges, and successes as part of a community-based curriculum? To do this, I will first describe the school, department, and program that I studied. Then, I will examine the program’s curricular activities identified through my research as a participant-observer over the course of the 2007-2008 school year. This will include a curricular overview and a description of student field experiences and final papers/presentations. I will then explore the individual experiences, perspectives and reflections of participating faculty and students. Finally, I will use scholarship on community-based pedagogies to identify and describe areas where the program succeeded and struggled. I will conclude the chapter by examining the significance of this curriculum study for other community-based educators.

The Human Services Program

The focus of this study was Jefferson Center’s Human Services Program, a school-within-a-school program serving 240 students, grades 9-12. Along with a program facilitator and a few part-time specialists, faculty includes one Human Services teacher, one computer teacher, two English, two math, two science, two social studies teachers. The entire program is located on the eastern wing of Jefferson Center’s third floor. Unless students are attending their foreign language, art, music, or physical
education courses, they spend all their school hours in the Human Services wing. Students access their lockers on the Human Services wing and congregate in its hallways during passing periods. This arrangement gives the Human Services Program a very “small school” feel; teachers and students interact with great familiarity as most teachers know most students in the program. The Human Services program facilitator and faculty easily monitor the single hallway connecting classrooms and quickly identify visitors or students from other programs who are lost or in need of redirection. Because of the proximity of classrooms, faculty communicate frequently about logistical issues: student attendance and behavior, the shared use of collective resources (computer laboratories, printers, audio-visual aids), and any adjustments to bell schedules for guest speakers or other curricular activities. Students in the Human Services Program are linked to the broader school community through their elective classes: languages, physical education, arts and music, which they take with students from other Jefferson Center programs. Human Services students also interact with students from other programs for school functions (assemblies, dances), school sports, and the lunch period.

The Human Services Program at Jefferson Center was in its first year as an official program during the course of my field work. The program was previously called the Paideia Program and offered college preparatory classes, a team-based interdisciplinary curricular approach, and its cornerstone “seminar class.” Based on ideas generated from Adler’s (1982) Paideia philosophy, the program was organized around three “columns of instruction:” (1) didactic instruction of information; (2) intellectual skills coaching; and (3) seminar discussion of ideas, concepts, and values. Core courses
integrated didactic instruction and skills coaching and the seminar discussions were taught by teams of faculty as a separate bell period.

During the summer of 2007, the Paideia program facilitator and its two social studies teachers reorganized the program into the Human Services Program. They changed the Paideia seminar class to a Human Services class for each grade level, 9-12. They also changed the 12th grade Social Studies curriculum from Philosophy/Psychology to Sociology/Psychology. The program facilitator, Spillings explained the changes this way,

The Paideia Program was one of the last two programs at Jefferson Center to not be directly affiliated with some sort of vocational/career pathway. In the last two years, with parents increasingly confused with what Paideia is… and knowing our clientele, knowing our students and their career interests, we found a good fit with Human Services. It was a career pathway they were just starting at the state level…it gave us the opportunity to bring in state money to supplement and augment what we do here in the program. We are facing budget shortfalls. Annually we have been cutting teachers so finding a natural fit with Human Services - which was also a state recognized vocational/career pathway - brought us additional state funding.

The Human Services career pathway is defined by the state’s department of education as including “technical and professional-level careers related to families and human needs within economic, political and social systems such as social services, counseling and mental health services, consumer services and personal care services.” At the 9th and 10th grades, the Human Services course is taught by a full-time Human Services teacher and the curriculum revolves around a Human Services textbook exploring career pathways. At the 11th grade, the Human Services course operates as a homeroom or free period for 11th graders. The course is offered by the 11th and 12th grade math and science teachers who were not informed about the program change before
the school year started. One teacher explains, “We didn’t know the shape of the program and just came in at the start of the year and there was this Human Services course that we were teaching. We had nothing to work with.” There was no curriculum in place and none developed during the school year; teachers used the period to take attendance and allowed students to work on assignments and use computers.

At the 12th grade, the Human Services course is taught by the 11th and 12th grade English and Social Studies teachers who have structured the curriculum to support their community-based service and research program, the Second Tuesday Project. Through the Second Tuesday Project (STP), students research a community issue or problem using field experiences with social service agencies, classroom guest speakers, and web and library-based resources. The Second Tuesday Project and the 12th grade Human Services Course served as the focus of this curriculum study. All students in the class were previously enrolled in the Paideia program and, like some of their teachers, were surprised at the start of the year to be part of a new program.

The Second Tuesday Project (STP) is described in program materials as “a team-based, multi-disciplinary, senior level project that requires each student to research a specific social issue within the Riverside community (i.e. homelessness, hunger, poverty, pollution, etc.) and implement a plan to help resolve that issue.” Research about a particular community issue was based primarily on students’ experiences working at a related agency on the second Tuesday of each month throughout the school year. More than a service-learning project, the STP emphasizes understanding the problems and issues facing the Riverside community and identifying how students can contribute through their research and solutions. Michaels describes the fundamental questions
guiding the Second Tuesday Project as “How does the Riverside society help its members who are most at need? How do we provide a decent life to people in our community? How do we help people who are less fortunate?”

Though service to the community was important in the STP, the teachers emphasized the research aspect of the project, spending the most class time supporting students’ writing of their research paper and organization of the presentation. Therefore, I did not study the program as a service-learning project, instead focusing - like the teachers did - on how the experiences of research and service contributed to students’ understanding of a local community issue or problem.

The purpose of this curriculum study is to describe a community-based classroom program by focusing on the structure of the curriculum, the experiences of teachers and students, and the program’s significance for other community-based classroom curricular efforts. With its emphasis on Riverside social issues and direct community involvement, the 12th grade Human Services curriculum and Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson Center is a good example of a community-based curricular project.

12th Grade Human Services Classroom Teachers and Climate

Typically, co-teachers Michaels (Social Studies) and Patterson (English) split the seniors into two groups during the Human Services bell period unless they are welcoming guest speakers, working on large-group assignments, or discussing upcoming curriculum. When the seniors are together and Michaels and Patterson are team-teaching, the classroom energy is high. The seniors have been together for four years in their small program and quickly create a social, loud, and busy classroom atmosphere. They have
also been students of Michaels and Patterson since the 11th grade which fosters a strong level of comfort and familiarity between students and teachers.

When together in Michaels’ open, organized classroom, he generally acted as lead teacher as he was primarily responsible for organizing guest speakers and course logistics. Patterson moved amongst the straight and narrow rows of desks, taking attendance, handing back papers, and conferring with individual students. As groups of students drifted off topic or became disruptive, both Michaels and Patterson worked together to redirect students to the task at hand. Michaels and Patterson were respectful towards each other, quick to support each other’s efforts and acted as a united front when students challenged requirements or assignments.

When students were separated into the two classrooms, the mood was much calmer; students were quicker to begin work and focus on assignments. Michaels’ room was very tidy, neat and organized. He led his class in a linear, focused manner. His agenda was on the board each day and he was routine about attendance and paperwork. When challenged about his expectations, assignments, or grading, Michaels was firm; he dismissed arguments by reiterating his standards, redirected student complaints with humor, or reassured students that he welcomed their individual concerns before or after class. His sense of humor, self-deprecating and also thought provoking, challenged students’ assumptions about race and class, and was described by students as “respectful,” “mature,” and “challenging – in a good way.”

Michaels was very open addressing racial differences and stereotypes through his interactions with students. He did not avoid the fact that he was a White male teaching almost all Black students. Racial differences were often included in his jokes which were
for the most part respected by students. Michaels tended to use jokes about race in
provocative ways, challenging students without making anyone too uncomfortable. On
one occasion, Nikki was sharing her experiences at her STP site with nursing home
residents. She was telling stories about “Big D,” a resident who was “living the life,” and
more or less the social director of the home. Nikki was describing the relationship
between “Big D” and “this Black lady,” another resident, when Michaels interrupted,

“Well, because she’s White.”

Michaels asked, “Well, how do we know? Why does it matter that the other lady
is Black?”

Nikki replied, “That all the Black residents were unhappy!”

Michaels pushed her, “But why? What is going on there, doesn’t that make you
wonder?” Nikki, a jokester, dismissed his question with a flip of her hand, and the class
laughed about the interchange. Michaels went on to call on other students.

I witnessed Michaels doing this often, challenging students on assumptions and
stereotypes in ways meant to raise awareness, not necessarily engage in a directed
discussion of race, power, or discourse. His tone was often light and humorous, never
critical or offensive. It seemed his motivation was simply to make students aware of the reproduction of stereotypes and to challenge them, even if only in passing, to consider the meaning of their assumptions. Michaels was very open about his presence as a White, male, teacher in a predominantly African-American school. He was respected by students and considered to be fair, decent, and open to student concerns and issues.

Patterson’s relationship to students was different. The only time I heard her allude to cultural differences was during our interviews. Once, she discussed her frustrations with students whom she felt were not taking advantage of the learning opportunities in her class and who dismissed the curriculum as sub par. In response, she wanted to tell students, “I am not giving you less because you are Black, I’m giving you everything that I would give anybody - that I’ve been giving my own kids - take it!”

Patterson’s class was more unstructured than Michaels’. Desks were arranged in a half circle (though most students still chose to sit as far away from “front and center” as possible) and the room was cluttered with literature texts, posters, file cabinets, and work tables. Attendance and management of paperwork took longer in Patterson’s classroom as she attended to a number of tasks (attendance, handing back papers, dealing with tardy students, answering the telephone, arguing about grades, writing assignments on the board) at the same time. Her tone was even tempered and patient with a good degree of badgering students when their work was inadequate. She was more willing than Michaels to discuss, argue, and defend her assignments and grading when students challenged her standards (as they did frequently). Students collectively lamented and only sometimes respected Patterson’s “tough” grading; they agreed she set very high
expectations for their participation and work in class. When it came to deadlines, Patterson was firm but consistently tried to find ways for students to make up work fairly.

**12th Grade Human Services Curriculum Overview**

The basic components of the 12th grade Human Services curriculum include the Second Tuesday Project (field experiences, written reflections, class discussions), an introduction to community social issues (homelessness, domestic violence), guest speakers, and the research, organization and writing of final papers and presentations.

In the beginning of the year, before the STP began, the Human Services course introduced two community issues selected by Michaels and Patterson: domestic violence and homelessness. Four weeks were spent on each topic. Students read articles from newspapers and magazines related to domestic violence and homelessness in Riverside, discussed the issues, welcomed guest speakers from local social service agencies, and wrote brief reflection papers summarizing the issues, their reactions, and potential solutions. As the “domestic violence” and “homelessness” weeks progressed, Patterson and Michaels communicated almost daily regarding discussion articles, guest speakers, and reaction paper prompts. These mini-planning sessions happened quickly before school as students were walking into class. Rarely did Patterson and Michaels plan curriculum more than a day or two in advance unless field trips or guest speakers were scheduled.

Early in these first two months, students were introduced to the Second Tuesday Project and given time to begin researching, contacting and setting up meetings with potential community organizations and agencies. Students made most of these initial connections with organizations via telephone and by October, were expected to have an
agency or organization identified for their first visit. Students were urged to find organizations that related to their own interests but there was little curricular support for students to explore, refine, and articulate their interests in community issues. Michaels provided students with a list of over 100 social service, education, health care, and environmental organizations and their phone numbers but offered little other formal direction for students initiating their STP placement. Michaels stressed that this “hands off” approach encouraged students to take initiative identifying and contacting interesting organizations.

The degree to which students were successful making contacts varied. In some cases, Michaels had to step in to help facilitate the process or explain the STP to agency contacts. In other cases, students who had successfully arranged placements grudgingly found themselves partnered with classmates who had failed to make other arrangements and who, according to student interviewees, “just tagged along” in order to secure a field site by the October deadline.

The Second Tuesday Project had an introductory handout written by Michaels describing the project’s purpose, assignments and schedule but there was no concrete curriculum to support the project at the outset of the school year. “We don’t have a curriculum,” Patterson said. She explained how she and Michaels did not have time to organize curriculum before school started so she spent the summer clipping newspaper articles and brainstorming ideas related to community needs, issues, problems, and participation. Michaels described his planning as “flying by the seat of my pants,” but having worked with similar service-learning programs in the past, he had a clear idea of how to facilitate students’ interactions with local agencies. In fact, the only clear
organization of teaching responsibilities was that Michaels would handle all student placements and contacts with local agencies and Patterson would handle all aspects of the research paper.

Some of the more influential and engaging curricular activities offered were less due to planning than “a last minute stroke of inspiration.” This is how Patterson described her “Graffiti Wall,” a discussion and brainstorming tool she introduced to the seniors the first month of school. Patterson hung a very large sheet of butcher paper along one wall of her classroom, provided students with markers, and asked them to graffiti on the wall things they wanted to change in their community. The students were very excited about the task; they quickly got to work, busily jotting down a host of issues including prostitution, halfway houses, drug dealers, pollution, violence, and poor living conditions. Over the course of a week, students continued adding to the graffiti wall and discussing the issues displayed. Patterson was very satisfied with the assignment, she felt it was a great way to generate interest in community issues and begin discussions about what mattered to students in their neighborhoods and communities. At the end of the school year, students cited the Graffiti Wall as an important curricular activity that helped them draw upon their personal experiences in the community as inspiration for their Second Tuesday Project final papers and presentations. Reflecting on the activity at the end of the school year, Patterson remained surprised about its origins and (lack of) planning; she was just “digging around” in the supply room, found the butcher paper and came up with the activity minutes before class started.

Aside from the Graffiti Wall, there were no other curricular activities that directly engaged students in discussions about their communities, issues, and problems.
Activities, including those as part of the homelessness and domestic violence units, were more a collection of tasks (i.e. read article, write a one-page response, discuss its meaning) than cohesive pieces of a broader project. Aside from a schedule of guest speakers, field trips, and assignment due dates, students and faculty did not have a multi-week curricular plan in place that allowed them to contextualize daily activities as part of a broader curricular effort.

As the Second Tuesday Project got up and running the third month of school, Human Services class time was redirected in support of the project. The purpose of the project is stated in program materials as helping students “learn to utilize advanced research technologies, develop successful interviewing skills, create and implement solutions to community problems, construct a formal college level paper detailing their discoveries and experiences, and present their findings in a professional multi-media platform.” During their Human Service class, students researched their organizations and issues using the Internet and school library. Once established with an organization, students would go directly to their organization on the second Tuesday of each month instead of school and return home at the end of the day. Students were expected to spend 40 hours over the course of the school year at their community field site and were monitored by time sheets and Michaels’ communications with the organizations. He spent much of his Second Tuesday mornings on the telephone following up with agency contacts to check on student attendance and performance in the field.

Upon their return to school Wednesday, students shared their field experiences in class discussions. Patterson and Michaels separately facilitated the loosely structured round-robin discussions where students reported to each other their activities from the
previous day. Following individual student accounts, class members and teachers asked clarifying questions: the purpose of a certain task, the goals of the organization, the nature of student-mentor relationships. These Wednesday discussions were limited by the 50 minute Human Services class period. Sometimes field reports continued through Thursday’s class but by most Thursdays, students were assigned and working on short response papers describing that week’s field experiences. The response paper was also primarily a reporting tool; students detailed their field activities including what time they arrived on site, what they did, where they went, with whom they worked and what time they left. Patterson and Michaels used the paper to assess student attendance and participation in the field.

Throughout the year, students were in and out of the classroom as part of their Second Tuesday research. Occasionally, groups of students were permitted to go to the neighboring Riverside University library to use research databases there. A few times, individuals and pairs of students working on similar issues visited additional organizations for interviews with community members working closely on related issues. On one occasion, all Human Services seniors traveled to a large county social service agency and met with employees from multiple social service departments.

In support of students’ research for the Second Tuesday Project, the Human Services seniors participated in field trips to the neighboring Riverside University Library where students were given a standard tour of research databases. Students were permitted a small amount of time to research their own topics on university browsers. Human Services teachers and students also continued to welcome guest speakers to the classroom who discussed some of the larger social service agencies in Riverside, careers
in the social services, or available summer internship positions. Some additional support was given to students regarding the research process. I spoke to the students about the process of community-based research and ran a mini-workshop on developing research questions and identifying community resources (see lesson plan, Appendix A). On another occasion, Patterson and Michaels worked with students brainstorming and rehearsing interview questions for agency representatives. Unfortunately, these initial efforts were not revisited after students had a chance to apply them in the field. If their questions, research findings, or interview responses did not resonate with field experiences, there was no structured classroom time when students could discuss issues. There was no curriculum in place to help them grapple with the research process, make sense of findings, and propose relevant solutions.

On the contrary, as the year progressed more and more time was given to students to freely work on their papers and presentations in the computer lab. Teachers used this time to catch up on grading and assignments from other classes and rarely worked individually or with groups of students on their research. There was little direct guidance as to what databases or search engines students might find useful, and the research days were relatively unproductive, unplanned and without a clear purpose. Students often used class time to finish assignments for other courses, check email, or surf the Internet.

Final research papers were handed in to Patterson who helped students with revisions before their inclusion in students’ writing portfolio. Presentations were held in the school auditorium and were open to the community. Only a handful of parents, administrators, and community organization representatives attended. On one day of presentations, the 11th grade Human Services students were invited. All presentations
involved the use of PowerPoint software; a few students included photographs from cameras Michaels provided but most slides were text-based.

*Students’ field experiences and final presentations.*

Student field experiences were extremely diverse in both the type of work they were doing at an agency and their personal responses to that work. Karen, working with an agency focused on improving school readiness for low-income toddlers, joined her mentor on home visits to observe infant/toddler development and offer home-based caregiver and parenting tutorials. Karen was engaged as she told stories about teenage mothers, developmentally delayed infants, “bad home situations,” and unprepared parents. The more she talked, the more passionate she became about the lack of parenting skills young moms were bringing to the task and the importance of agencies like hers supporting child development and providing much-needed parent education.

Taryn discussed her work tutoring students at a school for autistic children and described unique materials and classroom organization. She carefully explained how students’ abilities differed from her Jefferson Center classmates’ and how much of her time was spent “keeping students awake and focused on their work.”

Briana was enthusiastic throughout the year about her work at a foster-care support center dedicated to training volunteer mentors to provide additional support and supervision for children in the foster care system. She was disheartened by social workers’ large case-loads and difficult work conditions but impressed with case workers’ and mentors’ selfless gifts of time, friendship and patience with the children.

Charity described “herding” grade-schoolers at an after-school YMCA program and was discouraged by the children’s rowdy and confrontational behavior. Candace
agreed, sharing stories about unruly third graders at a nearby elementary school where
she was tutoring. After the holidays, Kim shared her astonishment at the generous gifts
received by children at the group home where she was working. She described Christmas
at the orphanage, rich with local celebrity visits, field trips, holiday parties and loads of
presents.

Adam criticized the lack of organization at his agency, a job-support center for
teens and young adults. He complained throughout the year about having very little to do
and how his “best day there ever” was when he was given fliers to post on a bulletin
board.

Although she was interested in her agency’s work improving urban neighborhood
environments in an effort to reduce crime, Dana remained frustrated with her STP. Aside
from one field trip with her mentor to take photographs of low-income neighborhoods,
Dana spent her time “spinning in my chair, reading brochures and watching my mentor
work at her computer.”

Occasionally, students’ reports would launch class discussion in somewhat
awkward directions. Carrie and Lynette described their experiences working at an
HIV/AIDS support agency and were surprised to learn that the agency helped clients pay
rent, health care and grocery bills. Carrie and Lynette interviewed some of the clients
and were fascinated by and intent on divulging the details of clients’ sexual narratives
(which the clients had freely shared with the students). The class was equally curious
about the clients and their relationship to the agency, launching into an uproarious
discussion about whether one should choose to be homosexual and HIV positive in order
to receive economic benefits. Michaels attempted to sort out students’ misconceptions
about choice, sexual orientation and HIV declaring, “Homosexuality is not a choice! Don’t you remember anything from Psychology? Studies show that one’s sexual orientation is primarily set at birth!” It took a while for his comments to temper the buzz about the “benefits” of being HIV positive but students eventually – though without closure – dropped the issue as Michaels called on another student to report on their STP.

John grumbled when Patterson asked about his field site, unimpressed with his experiences “shucking boxes” and sorting pencils for his agency which provides school supplies to low-income schools. When asked by classmates why shucking boxes was part of his job, he explained that his organization collects, reorganizes, and distributes donated supplies to needy classrooms. Much of his organization’s day to day work involves the physical process of organizing and transporting boxes of supplies.

Chuck’s lack of enthusiasm for his field site was similar to John’s. Chuck was assigned to work at a local soup kitchen and lamented “being on my feet all day” restocking freezers, moving cheese, doing dishes. The class was aghast at the extent of Chuck’s physical labor and his exhausted description of how every second Tuesday, for eight hours, he “only ever sat down to eat lunch.”

“So what have you learned about hunger?” Michaels asked.

Chuck replied dryly, “That everyone likes to eat.”

The class erupted with laughter.

Aside from occasional follow up questions, Michaels and Patterson rarely directed discussions beyond basic student reporting. They seldom used students’ experiences as springboards for discussions about the social, environmental or economic contexts related to the issues students were learning about.
Like their field experiences, students’ final papers and presentations varied in their cohesiveness and success. Some presentations, like Briana’s, made connections between her field experiences, its broader social contexts, and potential solutions. Exploring the issues of abuse and neglect in the foster care system and the lack of adequate supervision, she writes,

I believe that abuse of foster children is something that is going to take a lot of people to permanently end, but we can start working on it today by becoming a mentor or by helping out students interested in careers in the social sciences by offering scholarships…Child advocates and case workers, like the ones I had the privilege of working with are key to solving the problem of child abuse in foster homes.

Kayla-Jean worked at a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting African-American art and culture in the community. Her final paper demonstrated the STP’s potential to foster connections between personal experiences, broader social contexts, community challenges and local solutions. Kayla-Jean explored issues of identity, culture, and community-building at many levels: antagonism between female African-American teens, negativity in the Black community, the vibrant history of African-American art and culture, and the role of her agency in uplifting the Black community through theater and dance. In her paper and presentation, Kayla-Jean connected her experiences with the organization (volunteering at community festivals, auditions, presentations, and performances) to issues of Black identity in the African-American teenage community. She wrote that African-American youth culture reflects the negative and destructive behaviors celebrated by rap music and argues that youth must understand the origins of Black culture, art and music in the U.S.: “..amongst Black youth I see the lack of respect we have for each other…I also see how the influence of music impacts how we behave towards others in our community…” Her paper and presentation
contextualized these observations in a brief history of African-American art and music. She concluded her argument by urging participation in local celebrations of African-American art and culture offered by non-profits and community organizations like hers. She argued young people engaged with community art and culture can develop a “sense of community pride by accessing our culture and history…” She suggests that this participation will “help share our sense of pride, identity and knowledge with our community.”

The majority of papers and presentations did not achieve this level of connectivity and relevance. For example, Valerie used her final paper and presentation to cite national statistics of uninsured children and list local insurance plans available to low-income families. She did not use her field experiences at a local pediatric clinic to inform her research but relied upon quotes, poems, and stories from the Internet. She concluded her paper and presentation with a poem this way:

In closing, I would like to start by saying when it comes to the struggle of children being provided for, it’s not their fault that they have to go though the things they do when it comes to their health…This poem talks about how hard it is on a daily basis to have such a burden on your shoulders…from child abuse to children’s health care, communities need to come together and prevent the stress in order to make them better and successful in the future.

Valerie’s very general summation of her community issue and proposed solution (“communities need to come together”) was typical of most students’ final papers and presentations.

After each presentation, there was some time for audience participation and questions but most discussions revolved around the speakers’ enthusiasm for the topic,
delivery, or overall clarity of purpose. There was little time for probing questions, further discussion of issues or explorations into the meaning of students’ experiences and ideas.

The Human Services course curriculum, what was done in class, is fairly straightforward: introduction to community social issues (domestic violence, homelessness), field work at local agencies, round-robin discussions about field work, independent work on the research paper, and the delivery of final presentations. Students’ field experiences, papers and presentations varied greatly. In some instances, students were able to use their experiences and research to gain valuable insights about their community. But in most instances, the course failed to foster a deeper understanding of community issues or develop skills for engaged citizenship.

**Teacher Reflections on the Human Services Course**

As deadlines for final papers and presentations loomed towards the end of the school year, tension between Patterson and Michaels grew. Both struggled to find time in the Human Services course to complete research papers and projects as they had hoped. The two became less able to meet before class to plan and often impatiently discussed curricular plans and argued program responsibilities as class began. In addition, both seemed to grow discouraged with the inconsistency of effort among students; Patterson and Michaels gave increasingly more scolding lectures to the seniors, warning them of the consequences of incomplete work and missed deadlines. In reflective discussions with teachers at the end of the year, they both highlighted two central challenges that stood out from the taxing year: their struggles planning and organizing the course, and the inconsistent ability of students to make connections between field experiences,
community issues, and solutions through their Second Tuesday Project research. In this section, I will explore these issues as faculty described them.

The lack of shared planning and vision for the Human Services course and the Second Tuesday Project was at the heart of all conflicts for Michaels and Patterson. Michaels’ priority was squarely focused on the Second Tuesday Project’s program logistics: getting students out in the field, making sure they got to their sites and had stories to tell when they returned, and facilitating the final presentation symposium. Patterson was most concerned with the quality of the final research paper; it would serve as one of the central pieces in seniors’ portfolios, a district-wide graduation requirement for which she was responsible.

Because of these priorities, Michaels reflected upon the need for more engaged field mentors, a stronger field and classroom curricular balance, and a wider audience at the research symposium to support student efforts. Because of accounts like Dana’s and Adam’s about having nothing to do during their fieldwork, Michaels grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of support by field mentors:

I want every professional who is working in the social services to be professional. I want them to be there when they are supposed to be there, I want them to want the kids to come in and learn more about this. Our experiences at times just made me more bitter about bureaucracy and bureaucrats and people who get these governments jobs…

Michaels supported the detailed process of writing research papers but also described the papers as “all-consuming.” He hoped in future years the course would emphasize students’ field experiences and the papers would not become the “be-all, do-all, end-all thing…that takes over Second Tuesday.” Michaels was also disappointed by
the turnout for the final presentations, wishing it had been better attended by parents, school personnel, and agency representatives.

From the 2006-07 school year to the 2007-08, Jefferson Center redistributed one hundred minutes a week from English classes to other courses due to school-wide schedule changes and the Human Services program change. Patterson’s main complaints about the Human Services course and the STP stemmed from this loss of English course time. She felt extremely limited in what she could accomplish in her now shorter English classes and felt forced to move some activities (like the research paper) to the Human Services course. She was unconvinced that other activities in the Human Services course reclaimed the value of those minutes. Patterson also spoke to the disorganization of the Human Services course that set an inconsistent tone for students:

If we are able to do the STP next year, then I think Michaels and I will have a clearer focus of what we need to establish, what we need to accomplish, what things we can discuss, keeping in mind the different agencies and topics the kids are interested in…if we have these ideas from the beginning, we’ll know where we are going…This year we didn’t develop a language because we really didn’t know quite where we were going. I know how I want my research paper to look at the end but what Michaels thought was different, that bred confusion. I think it would be better next year. This year has just been “OK, let’s try it – let’s see!”

Spillings was also frustrated with the lack of planning and curriculum to support the Second Tuesday Project.

We [the Human Service faculty] need to spend a day or two together, sharing our vision. We need to come to some agreement of what it is we want to do and how it is we want to do it…I think the primary thing we need to make this work is time and the facilitation to come up with the “how does this work, how do these pieces come together?” We need someone to drive that.
Faculty was also concerned with students’ ability to make connections between field experiences and community issues. Patterson felt students did not succeed in this effort and attributed the disconnect to their difficulty understanding research materials:

When students are doing the research, they don’t have the vocabulary to understand it, they read it and it doesn’t talk to them. And sometimes they just want to talk about themselves and they don’t see themselves as one of the statistics in the big picture. They just keep it at the personal level.

Michaels was also frustrated with students’ inability to make cognitive connections between personal experiences and broader issues. He described students’ reluctance to “dig deeper” this way: “I think there are some kids who say, “I live this (poverty, domestic violence, homelessness) every day, I can write about this and I don’t need to do much research.” He described students as “removed and unwilling” to look closely at issues related to their personal experiences.

Both Patterson and Michaels agree that the connections made between students’ interest, field experiences, and academic research through the Second Tuesday Project make it a valuable community learning experience. They disagree about the quality of those connections. Michaels explains,

What I love about STP is the structure of the program. The students identify the problems in the community, the students research generally to find out which ones they might be most interested in pursuing, the students choose their individual topic. They choose something about which they feel passionate. They find a community service agency that deals with that problem and then they do the service learning… so much of it is driven by their own interests and I think that is one of the greatest things about the program.

Patterson agreed that a community-based research paper driven by student interest and field experiences was far preferable to the literature based research paper she assigned in the past. But she also felt that the field experience did not always support
students’ initial interests – students were not always able to find an organization related to their interests. “The Graffiti Wall and students’ personal experiences were really powerful initially, and that’s the time they should have picked their research paper topic – it really doesn’t have to be aligned with the agency, sometimes you can’t get an agency to match.”

Patterson, Michaels and Spillings concur that taking time to develop better STP curriculum would strengthen the connections students can make between their interests, relevant community issues, field experiences, and academic research. “Sharing a vision,” developing a “common language,” and negotiating curricular requirements are all aspects of planning faculty identified as missing and in need of careful consideration before embarking on such an involved and dynamic course again. They also agreed that curriculum driven by student interest and personal experience made learning more relevant and meaningful - though Patterson argued these connections were not universal for participants.

*Student Reflections on the Human Services Course*

Through focus groups and individual interviews, students reflected strongly on three aspects of the Human Services course: (1) they were critical of course logistics including placements and curricular organization; (2) they valued their own field experiences; and (3) they valued each other’s field experiences and final presentations.

*Course logistics.*

Students’ field experiences varied widely in terms of activities on site and relationships with mentors. At least three students shared experiences where mentors either sent them out for extended lunch breaks or sent them home hours early but still
gave them full credit for the eight-hour day. Other students were disappointed by the work they were assigned. Students described some of their experiences as “boring,” “frustrating,” and a “waste of time.” Charity, working at the local YMCA explained,

We don’t have anything to do there until four in the afternoon when the kids come. Our mentor doesn’t have anything for us to do all morning. She says, “You all should just go to lunch and come back at four and I’ll give you full credit.” But I want to do something - that is why I’m there. Otherwise this is just like skipping school. I want something to do, I don’t want to sit in the house all day watching TV, waiting for her...

Charity’s reaction was similar to Dana’s who reported with frustration: “Each time, my mentor just gives me a bunch of pamphlets and packets to read...that only takes me a half an hour and then I just sit there for the rest of the day, watching her work on her computer, doing nothing.”

In interviews and focus group discussions, students were also critical of the Human Services Course and its supporting curriculum. Frustrated with Patterson and Michaels’ last minute planning, one student complained, “Things were just thrown at us out of nowhere at the last minute.” I often observed students in the computer lab making concerted efforts to locate research materials but floundering without clear direction and guidance. They often grew so frustrated they gave up on the task. Students felt unprepared for the level of research Patterson and Michaels requested, discouraged by the lack of support in accessing and utilizing research materials, and frustrated by the discontinuity of curriculum. Others students felt cheated by poor field experiences, arguing that a lack of interesting field experiences made the research paper very difficult to write.
Field experiences.

Though they were careful to clarify that it “depends on the site,” and was sometimes, “hit or miss,” many students found their field experiences valuable. Valerie explains,

I think that students being at different sites opened up a lot of issues in life for us. For example, one student researched homeless people at the drop-in-shelter and they really showed that not all homeless people are bums or drug addicts… there is a reason why people are homeless… the STP just made us think about a lot of things, I think it opened our eyes on a lot of different issues…

Briana agreed that the experience raised students’ awareness, “When I first heard about abuse in the foster care system, I was thinking, “those case workers aren’t doing their jobs!” but the more I researched the problem and found out about what case workers’ days are like, I was shocked.”

Students were proud of their participation in the STP and their final papers and presentations; they described the course as a “struggle,” an opportunity to take on adult responsibilities, and a challenge that they overcame. One group of focus group participants emphatically agreed with Briana who argued that instead of inviting the 11th grade Human Services students to the final presentations, Michaels should have invited the 9th graders because, as she explained, “I don’t know what is going to happen to them, or what planet they came off of, they are crazy…it would have been nice for them to see our presentations, see what we struggled with.” Students viewed the STP as a rite of passage and their presentations as a triumph - with the exemplary potential to “straighten out” the immature underclassmen.

Dana felt that the program was valuable because of what she learned about her community, in particular how small things (crumbling sidewalks and trash in the street)
impact larger things (neighborhood crime and violence). She felt her work and research made her have a “more knowledgeable, realistic view of my city.” Kayla-Jean felt her research at the Riverside Black Theater Company helped her develop a better understanding of “how our community functions,” especially in terms of Black identity, youth, and violence.

Peers’ field experiences.

When we spoke about the value students derived from the Second Tuesday Project, they did not distinguish between what they learned from their own projects and what they learned from each other. In focus group sessions, students spoke at length about how much they valued peers’ presentations, highlighting those on homelessness, foster care, and urban environments as especially interesting and meaningful. Briana explained,

The STP opened my eyes to things I hadn’t thought of, like Dana’s presentation on violence and how clean your community is. If you wrote those two things down – “litter” and “crime” on a piece of paper and said there was a connection, someone would think you were crazy. Who would have ever thought that the amount of litter could contribute to people dying in your neighborhood – we were learning something new. When she was talking about it at first I was thinking, “that’s not right” but then I thought about the neighborhoods I drive through where there is trash on the ground – those are neighborhoods where bad things happen… you go through Bridgedale and you will see trash on the ground, next to a garbage can. Go downtown, you will see trash everywhere…

Students reported learning more from projects like Dana’s that were clearly articulated and organized. These presentations included a description of a familiar community or social problem, additional research explaining the issues’ history and local context, personal experiences from the STP, an explanation of how a particular agency is addressing the problem at a local level, and a concrete and realistic proposal for solving
the problem. In other words, the most memorable, meaningful, and highly valued presentations were those that accomplished exactly what the assignment required.

For the most part, students were relatively comfortable with the Second Tuesday Project throughout the year. There were certainly aspects to gripe about: placements, boredom, and challenging assignments but they were proud of the finished product, felt they had accomplished a great deal, and valued the insights they gained about their community.

**Community-Based Education and the Human Services Course**

Revisiting place- and community-based research and scholarship in relation to findings from the STP curriculum study advances our understanding of the Human Services Program’s curricular challenges and successes. As well, it helps us understand more clearly where the STP falls in the spectrum of place- and community-based projects. In this section I will draw upon research on place- and community-based education to suggest ways the STP could strengthen its program and to identify findings relevant to other community and place-based efforts. Specifically, this section revisits the STP’s overarching purpose and structure, its flexibility in dismantling school-community borders, its critical omission of an “action plan,” its struggles with quality placements, and its fundamental challenges linking community-based learning theories with practice.
The Second Tuesday Project and Place-based Scholarship

Broad contexts and definitions.
In order to contextualize the STP as part of a broader curricular movement, it is useful to revisit theoretical definitions of place- and community-based education.

Gruenewald and Smith (2008) describe place-based education as:

…a community-based effort to reconnect the process of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life. Place-based or place-conscious education introduces children and youth to the skills and dispositions needed to regenerate and sustain communities. It achieves this end by drawing on local phenomena as the source of at least a share of children’s learning experiences, helping them to understand the processes that underlie the health of natural and social systems essential to human welfare (2008, p. xvi).

Gruenewald and Smith’s (2008) definition emphasizes the study of natural and social systems in place-based education. But for the most part, the STP did not include Riverside’s natural systems in its study of community health and welfare.

Although the course often incorporated Gruenewald’s (2003) other four dimensions of place (sociological, ideological, political, and physical) the STP omitted consideration of the ecological or natural dimension of place. The project referenced social dimensions of place through students’ study of issues like the foster care system, early child education and the plight of Riverside’s homeless. Sometimes the project incorporated political and ideological dimensions of place through issues like racial identity in Kayla-Jean’s work with the Riverside Black Theater Company. And the physical dimension of place was explored in conjunction with political and ideological dimensions through projects like Dana’s examining the relationship between neighborhood environments and community safety. Missing from the STP’s study of community needs and problems was the ecological dimension of place - the non-human
communities in Riverside. Though Michaels included on his initial list of agency contacts four environmental non-profit organizations (Riverside’s chapter of the Sierra Club, an urban nature preserve, an urban heritage farm and a local environmental advocacy organization) no students selected these organizations. In addition, class discussions missed some direct connections to the ecological dimension of place. For example, Dana’s study on neighborhood environmental quality had strong ties to the environmental justice movement (especially in terms of the relationships between neighborhood environments, race, and class); her work could have been expanded a great deal through connections with research, trends and solutions in environmental justice. By focusing primarily on the social dimensions of place, the Second Tuesday Project reproduced the idea of community as a strictly social phenomenon, isolated in its struggles and challenges from non-human, environmental, and ecological dimensions.

Other definitions of community-based education more generally address issues of social and environmental communities. It is important to revisit these definitions in order to contextualize the STP in broader curricular movements. Knapp (2008) describes key characteristics of place-based education like the use of the local environment for curriculum development, the school-community boundary crossing it requires, and the role of learners as “creators of knowledge as well as consumers of knowledge…assessed on the basis of how this knowledge contributes to the community’s well-being and sustainability….” (Knapp, 2008, p. 13). And Hutchinson (2004) explains that “Most community study initiatives aim to nurture in students a deep-seated appreciation for how their communities work” (2004, p. 42).
In the description of the Second Tuesday Project, Michaels and Patterson write that the program requires students to “research a specific social issue within the Riverside community and then implement a plan to help resolve that issue.” The research process centers around students’ field experiences at a local agency dedicated to an issue of their choice. The Second Tuesday Project’s goals resonate with the Gruenewald and Smith (2008) definition of place-based education cited above as it builds on the local phenomena of how an agency operates within the community to address a specific community issue. In addition, the Second Tuesday Project requires that students cross school-community boundaries by working with local organizations and proposing solutions to community problems through a research paper and final presentation. Students in Michaels and Patterson’s class are not interning at for-profit businesses or career shadowing in the private sector. They are linked with mentors at agencies dedicated exclusively to the health and welfare of the Riverside community. Students researched community health through the foster care system, unemployment services, low-income infant and child development programs, community support for citizens with HIV/AIDS, programs for the homeless and public efforts to improve the environmental quality of local neighborhoods. In its stated program goals, the Second Tuesday Project fits in a community-based learning model, even though the program and its notion of community omit critical consideration of the environmental and ecological dimensions of community and community wellness.

Also important in definitions of place- and community-based education is the concept of linkages. Gruenewald and Smith (2008) explain that community-based education, “help[s] [students] to understand the processes that underlie the health of
natural and social systems essential to human welfare (2008, p. xvi),” and Knapp (2008) argues that community-based learning should be assessed based on “how this knowledge contributes to the community’s well-being and sustainability….” (2008, p. 13). There is an assumption here that the purpose of experiential learning is the linking of those experiences to knowledge about the community. Community-based education ought to deepen and enrich young people’s understanding of their community and in turn, contribute to the well-being of the community. In terms of connectivity and linkages between field experiences, classroom research, and community knowledge, it seems the STP fell short, with only a few students able to make strong connections between community issues, their field work and service, their classroom research, and positive solutions. I will explore these issues in more detail later in this section.

Revisiting definitions of place- and community-based education helps identify areas where the STP was highly successful (facilitating authentic learning experiences in the community) and where it struggled (helping students make connections between their field work, research, and the community). In terms of community- and place-based education in the classroom then, the STP is a program that succeeds with some aspects of community-based education but is less successful with others.

*Flexibility.*

One of the key factors supporting the successes of the Jefferson Center Human Services program was the program’s ability to remove barriers between the school and the Riverside community. Not only did students study community issues in the classroom with guest speakers, local news media and academic data bases, they physically left school, and went out into the community to work with agencies,
individuals, and clients directly involved with community issues. Michaels and Patterson were able to utilize this expanded network of community resources because of the logistical flexibility of their small program. Students could leave the Jefferson Campus to visit the nearby university library, attend additional meetings with mentors during school hours, visit other organizations related to their issues during daily work hours, and most importantly, leave campus entirely on the second Tuesday of every month to work at their field site.

To do this, Michaels and Patterson had a number of supportive features in place. Students at Jefferson Center, like all students in the Riverside Public School system, are issued bus passes which allow them to inexpensively ride city buses before, during, and after school. In addition, Jefferson Center students were issued student identification cards to Riverside University which allowed them access to the campus library and computer laboratories. Most importantly, Michaels and Patterson sent their students all over the city during school hours because they were able to modify students’ academic schedules by conferring with other core Human Services faculty – all located nearby. Because the entire Human Services faculty team was located on one floor in one wing of the school building and program teachers knew all participating students, it was very easy for Patterson and Michaels to change bell schedules, correct attendance, and accommodate students who were out of the building as part of their Second Tuesday Project. In addition, the entire 12th grade teaching team valued and prioritized the Second Tuesday Project and remained helpful and flexible with students needing scheduling or assignment changes throughout the year. This included accommodating students who missed lessons, assignments, or deadlines due to their Second Tuesday Project.
participation. This faculty culture of flexibility and support for community involvement may have stemmed from previous work as a Paideia program; Roberts (1999) explains that two of the five “essential elements of a Paideia school” ("Paideia Active Learning," 2003) are an emphasis on community involvement and the importance of flexible scheduling to meet instructional needs.

Parents and school administrators were supportive of this flexibility and after initial permission slips and explanatory handouts students did not have to complete additional paperwork in order to leave campus. Michaels and Patterson entrusted their students with a great deal of responsibility to navigate the city bus system, find their way around town, and show up where and when they were supposed to. Although faculty checked up on the students by maintaining communications with field organizations, the responsibility of attendance and participation was completely on the students’ shoulders.

The ability to restructure the schedule and locations of a typical high school day afforded the Human Services students authentic involvement in community life and city services. Requiring students to make their way independently around town broadened their geographic understanding of the city, its neighborhoods, thoroughfares, and the location of public service organizations. In addition, allowing students to be present at organizations during productive hours of the work day enabled them to participate in active, authentic work, further involving them in the day-to-day life of the community. Keyes and Gregg (2001) explain that flexibility like this is essential in school-community relationships:

The form of a school's relationship to community - whether it is that of community center, school-based enterprise benefiting the community, or community as curriculum - must be determined locally and will depend on the motivating force. To be successful, all three require reconceptualizing
traditional roles, protocols, and uses of school time. All three require school personnel to be flexible and to have a tolerance for risk, uncertainty, and a certain amount of messiness (2001, p. 45).

Gruenewald and Smith (2008) also discuss similar types of organizational and conceptual changes that need to be made to traditional schooling to enable vibrant community and place-based projects in the classroom. Certainly, the Second Tuesday Project demonstrated how school spatial organization, small school-within-a-school programs, and localized administration enabled students and teachers to take advantage of community-based learning opportunities.

*The “action plan.”*

Still, the STP did not seem to reach the full potential of place and community-based education. During students’ final presentations, many were unable to make connections between their field experiences, their research on community issues, and viable solutions. Without the ability to see the multiple levels and dimensions of the problems they were exploring (the day-to-day efforts of their organizations, the history and context of the community problems, and the economic, social and environmental structures that are implicated in community problems) most students were unable to offer reasonable solutions to their community issues. This step, turning community-study into community-action and advocacy, is essential to maximizing the potential of community-based education. Melaville et. al. (2006) explain that a key component of community-based curricula is the application of knowledge - real-world problem solving:

> As an intentional dimension of the curriculum, community-based learning helps students acquire, practice, and apply subject matter knowledge and skills. At the same time, students develop the knowledge, skills, and attributes of effective citizenship by identifying and acting on issues and concerns that affect their own communities (2006, p. 3).
Gruenewald and Smith (2008) agree:

> Young people need an education that affirms their capacity to solve problems and contribute to the welfare of others…when place-based education is implemented in ways that truly conjoin school with community and that provide opportunities for democratic participation and leadership, children are given the chance to partake in the collective process of creating the sustainable and just world that must come to replace the world of discrimination and waste that has begun to unravel around us now (p.346).

The Second Tuesday Project did not support students in this process. Though initial program materials assigned students to “implement a plan to help resolve that issue,” faculty seemed to run out of time, energy, and focus to help students do this work. There were no structured opportunities where students could discuss and share ideas for solutions, no chance for students to hypothesize, plan and propose solutions, and certainly not to implement them. As a result, only a few students’ presentations included suggestions for addressing community issues; many students simply neglected the task. Sadly, by omitting this crucial component, students missed an opportunity to see their research through to student-generated solutions that would support their developing civic identities and foster their “capacity to solve problems.” Instead, they often concluded their presentations by restating community problems best left for others to solve.

*Quality field placements.*

Prioritizing student choice in field placements, Michaels and Patterson provided students with a list of over 100 agencies as potential field sites. Students scrambled to introduce themselves and the Second Tuesday Project to prospective organizations and cooperating mentors. With an emphasis on securing a placement by the October deadline, students did not focus on the type of fieldwork their choice would entail. Michaels was most concerned with finding placements that matched student interests
instead of placements that would offer students an active opportunity to explore community issues and solutions. As previously described, some agencies provided valuable learning experiences for students. Others were limited in what they could offer students for the duration of the project; in some cases, mentors left students without work for long periods of time or supported students’ falsifying their participation hours.

Interestingly, it seems that matching student interest with an agency didn’t necessarily guarantee a strong or meaningful experience, final paper or presentation. Some students were surprised to find themselves growing very passionate about organizations and issues they selected at the last minute out of convenience or desperation: the condition of urban environments, care for the elderly, or support services for the homeless were popular and meaningful to students based on their experiences in the field. It seemed that the quality of the placement was far more important to students than whether or not it reflected their interests. When students were doing engaging work on site, seeing their work as part of a broader effort, having meaningful discussions with agency employees and clients, and making connections between community issues and solutions, they had more positive learning experiences and more coherent final projects.

On the other hand, as I will detail in Chapter 5, some students with prior interest and experience with their community issue/problem found their STP research incredibly insightful, revelatory and transformative. In these cases, matching their interest with a related organization mattered a great deal. Still, these students had quality placements: positive field experiences with engaged mentors and meaningful work opportunities.

To improve the number of quality placements, Michaels and Patterson could try a few different approaches to setting up placements. First, they could limit the initial
suggested agencies to include only placements that have been positive for students in the past, that have a clear purpose and role for students, or those whose mentors are familiar with and enthusiastic about the goals and objectives of the program. By eliminating agencies that have little to offer students there is a higher likelihood that students will have positive experiences on site, even if the agency they will be studying is not directly related to their interests.

Second, communication between the school and the field agencies regarding the goals and objectives of the program could be improved. Mentors were provided only with a cover letter briefly describing the program curriculum and the hourly requirements. By sharing more of the goals, objectives, and theory guiding the project early on, Michaels and Patterson could develop field mentors into stronger advocates of the community learning process. Swaminathan (2007) highlights the importance of quality field sites in community-based learning and urges that communication and planning between schools and participating community volunteers be closely coordinated: "the community site…cannot be taken for granted, and the curriculum at the sites cannot be assumed to mirror the social justice goals and aims of teachers" (2007, p. 134).

Michaels and Patterson could also provide a checklist of topics or guiding questions they want students and mentors to discuss throughout their year together: What is the problem this agency is addressing? What are the roots of the problem? Why is this happening? How is the agency addressing the issue? What more is needed? What does this issue and solutions tell us about our community? By including agencies and mentors in the curricular planning process, they can become the sort of community-leaders
Gruenwald and Smith (2008) imagine who advocate for school-based community learning experiences and help legitimize the efforts of teachers and students engaged in community learning.

Theory and practice.
At the heart of every challenge encountered by Patterson, Michaels and their students was what Patterson termed a lack of “common language” and what I term a lack of theoretical grounding. Both Patterson and Michaels were clear that they wanted their students researching social issues in the community by working with specific community agencies and ideally coming up with an “action plan.” But that was the extent of their guiding goals; and because these goals were not more clearly articulated, expressed, shared, and refined, they were quickly overshadowed by the day-to-day stresses and individual priorities of each teacher. As a result, struggles with student field placements, class curriculum, and administrative support for the program caused confusion, frustration, and curricular inconsistency for students, faculty and administrators.

The 12th grade Human Services course curriculum and the day-to-day class work that supports students’ second Tuesdays in the field would be much improved with a stronger theoretical grounding. Michaels articulated a guiding question at the outset of the year during an interview (“How does the Riverside society help its members who are most at need? How do we provide a decent life to people in our community? How do we help people who are less fortunate?”) but these questions were never further developed with Patterson, nor shared with agency mentors or students. Without a shared sense of purpose, some of the course activities, including the Graffiti Wall and even the field
experiences, became disconnected activities that were not part of any broad effort to understand, engage, and impact students’ community.

When applying place and community-based approaches to standard curriculum, learners focus on specific community and local issues. These concrete and often familiar contexts are part of what makes community-based learning so rich - it emphasizes local examples students can experience first hand, relate to and respond to directly. But it is easy for learners to narrow their scope so far that they are unable to see the broader implications or contexts of their experiences. This happened when Michaels’ students focused intently on an HIV positive client’s sexual history and their agency-supported “benefits package,” losing sight of broader issues. Students needed to be challenged to examine the broader contexts of the issue, directed to consider the social conditions surrounding the client’s experiences and the reasons why he needed community services and support.

In cases like these, curriculum that includes carefully constructed class discussions, thought-provoking and relevant media sources, and probing prompts for response papers can contextualize student experiences into broader social and political structures. Linking student experiences with big ideas and overarching questions moves their isolated but important experiences into a more comprehensive discourse connecting community social and environmental conditions to wider economic, social, environmental and political systems. These shifts situate student learning in historic, national and international contexts, fostering local and global scales of learning.

After addressing students’ misconceptions about HIV, sexuality, and choice, Michaels could have led students into a discussion about the economic and social
stressors disease places on individuals and their communities in Riverside. Students could have looked at the social stigmas attached to persons with HIV and their challenges finding and maintaining employment. Students could have reflected upon their own misconceptions about the disease. Students could have used Carrie and Lynette’s knowledge of the HIV support agency’s activities to compare how other cities and countries are addressing the needs of HIV positive citizens. In other words, had Michaels connected the students’ experiences with HIV positive clients to his overarching questions about the community’s job helping those less fortunate, students could have explored a variety of topics enriching their understanding of community health, global diseases, and social prejudice.

Community-based education can be a powerful process through which youth can “begin to understand and question the forces that shape places…develop a readiness for social action, and…the skills needed for effective democratic participation” (Gruenewald and Smith, 2008, p. xx). The potential for this level of involvement was present in the Human Services Course and in the introduction of the Second Tuesday Project. Some of Jefferson Center’s Human Services students were doing this critical connective, engaging, and meaningful work individually through the STP. Students like Kayla-Jean with African-American culture and identity, Dana with urban environments and violence, and Briana with child welfare and social science education, were making connections between community issues, historical conditions surrounding those issues, local and global implications of the issues, and potential community, regional, and global solutions. But without encouragement through cohesive daily curriculum and consistent guidance
on how to use field experiences to understand community issues and contexts, the majority of students missed the significance of their work in the community.

There are many ways community experiences can be developed and contextualized through community based education. By incorporating a guiding set of questions and goals that drive class discussions, response papers, and class activities, Patterson and Michaels’ curriculum could more consistently help students make connections between field experiences and local/global environmental, social, and economic conditions. In addition, collective examination of student experiences can enhance students’ understanding about the complexity of community life, its contexts, histories, and futures (i.e. What makes some of these issues similar? How do the issues relate to each other? Do they have any shared solutions? How do they shape our community?).

As a researcher well-enmeshed in the theoretical world of place- and community-based education, it was easy for me to identify the broader links, community connections and ways to enrich student experiences that Patterson and Michaels missed. I am interested in ways students’ experiences in the community can become building blocks for understanding community dynamics, change and civic participation. When working with students in focus groups, I wanted to understand how the STP was impacting their sense of community – I wanted to know how community-based education influenced their personal geographies. This very theoretical approach took my interactions and discussions with students regarding their field experiences in very different territory than their round-robin class discussions. In fact, the more students and I discussed the Second Tuesday Project at focus group sessions, the more excited students became about the
program, their field sites, and the lessons they were learning about their community. There were more stories to share from their field experiences, more reflections about the impacts of each other’s experiences, and more ways students saw connections between the work in the community and their understanding about school, community and their world. Reflecting on Dana’s presentation about urban environments led us into a discussion about the relationships between graffiti and violence in schools, urban and suburban school environments and the politics of school funding. Candace and Charity’s stories about unruly elementary children they mentored through the STP led to discussions about teaching, socio-economics, and family cultures of high academic expectations. The more we discussed students’ STP experiences in terms of local and global contexts, the more complex, meaningful, and insightful those experiences became.

The very practice-based approach of Michaels and Patterson – getting their students out into the field, returning to the classroom for research and write-up - certainly spurred some great learning experiences for a handful of students. In fact, when students did exactly what was asked in the final projects (“research a specific social issue within the Riverside community and implement a plan to help resolve that issue”) everyone gained valuable insights about the community. But not all students made these connections by themselves. Instead, many students floundered, pulling together a string of facts for presentations and final projects that were neither coherent nor grounded in the rich community life they had been a part of. Students were not able to contextualize their experiences in broader social and community structures. In some respects, students needed to be taught, explicitly through class discussions and mini-response papers, how to use their field experiences to understand their communities. Students needed the larger
questions explicitly posed to them, “What does this mean? What does that experience say? Why is it that way?” in order to get the most out of many hours spent in the field stocking food pantry shelves, shucking boxes of donated pencils, attempting to interview overworked foster care case managers, and trying to run recreational programs with unruly eight-year olds. And in order to pose these questions and lead students through these cognitive leaps, faculty needed a clearer vision, common language and shared theory guiding their curriculum - a theory that would set the course for what they were doing, where they were going, how they were going to get there, and why it mattered.

Keyes & Gregg (2001) explain that in high performing schools working closely with their communities, “People hold a common vision and care enough about their vision to be willing to share information and power to achieve it. The quality of relationships among people seems to be the critical element within schools, within communities, and between schools and communities” (2001, p. 44). It is clear that the Second Tuesday Project was missing this common vision, and the quality of relationships between the program, the students, and the many partner organizations were underdeveloped.

Finally, without a theoretical grounding and sense of purpose that was shared with Jefferson Center administrators, the program faced potentially fatal challenges. Spillings, the Human Services program facilitator, was in full support of the program but it mostly flew under the radar of Jefferson Center administrators whose organizational decisions through the 2007-2008 school year reflected their priorities of funding and standards-based testing. At the end of the school year, neither Patterson, Michaels, nor Spillings were certain of their program’s status for the 2008-2009 school year. Physically, they
would be changing rooms as their section of Jefferson Center was set to be remodeled. There was also a great deal of tension among faculty at Jefferson Center as news came that they would be losing 10-20 faculty over the summer due to decreased attendance. Finally, plans for continuing the Second Tuesday Project and the entire Human Services Program were lost as teachers were notified in the Spring that Jefferson Center would be phasing out the five small-school programs in subsequent years in exchange for a school-wide focus on math and science. This news, compounded with a year of struggling through program logistics and strained relationships with administration left Michaels and Patterson in deep deliberation as to whether they would continue teaching at Jefferson Center. Michaels eventually put in a request for transfer to another Riverside public school and Patterson left open the possibility of retirement as the summer approached.

Without the support of administration for the Human Services Program and the Second Tuesday Project, its future is dim. When teachers cannot anticipate their courses and programs for subsequent years, their ability to plan ahead and collaborate diminish. The capacity to develop a common language and a shared set of goals for their interdisciplinary programs is shrouded by the uncertainty of the coming year. It was clear to all faculty involved in the Second Tuesday Project that more planning would be needed to see the program reach its potential. But without the administration’s support to create a stable teaching environment, that future is unattainable.

Jefferson Center’s Human Services Program possessed a great deal of potential in its Second Tuesday Project. The program had the flexibility of a small school enabling students and faculty a great deal of freedom to venture into the field and break down the
physical barriers between classroom and community learning environments. Michaels had amassed a rich network of community resources including social service agencies, the city transport system, the Riverside Library, the Riverside University, and many individual professionals who welcomed Jefferson Center students into the community through their field work, research, and mentorship. Michaels and Patterson had established a cooperative working relationship, both dedicated to the practice of community-based education. They had also built enough support for the program with other Human Services faculty to enable students the time, resources, and flexibility needed to complete their work in the field. Patterson and Michaels encountered challenges as the year progressed and continued on a practice-based course of activities and assignments without a map, a “common language,” or a guiding sense of purpose directing their practice. Because of this, the value of student field placements, the continuity and significance of curriculum, and the program’s overall value to the school were compromised. Though some students’ research produced significant insights about Riverside’s social, economic, cultural, and environmental communities, many others’ demonstrated a missed opportunity. Students were not able to move from their meaningful and interesting (even when they were “boring”) field experiences to a deeper understanding of how their community functions, why, and what that means for its past, present, and future.

*Implications for Community-Based Educators*

The experiences of Patterson, Michaels and their students integrating a community-based curriculum into their 12th grade Human Services course offer relevant insights for other educators. Most significant is the importance of establishing a shared
theory to guide the practice of community-based teaching and learning. Also important was the unique way in which the Human Services faculty was able to organize the logistics of getting students actively involved in the community. Finally, their project was a testament to the positive potential of community-based education, where even with limited curriculum supporting field experiences, positive learning experiences did occur and some students were able to see themselves and their community in more complex, dynamic ways.

Theory and practice.
Without a shared sense of purpose and a collective sense of why students should engage community, without an articulated set of big ideas and questions the course would explore, teachers, students and faculty at Jefferson Center experienced a disconnected, often frustrating course of isolated activities. It is essential that educators, community members, school administrators and students engaged in community-based learning take the time to plan, think forward, and contextualize curricular activities in a broader set of goals and objectives.

Patterson and Michaels had the “practice” of community-based education in place: they sent students into the field, supported students with community-based research projects, and invited community members and community issues to be a part of their classroom curriculum. They were missing a theoretical understanding of community-based education which would have tied together their community-based activities and helped them transform field experiences into valuable jumping off blocks for community understanding and action. A theoretical foundation would also have helped them facilitate discussions into more dynamic explorations of community life,
contexts, and how individual student experiences (personally and through the STP) help illuminate the social, economic, environmental and political contexts of their community. Gruenewald and Smith (2008) offer a set of simple questions for socioecological inquiry and action that can serve to ground and focus community-based curricular practices, “What is happening here? What happened here? What should happen here? What needs to be transformed, conserved, restored, or created in this place?” (2008, p.148). This set of questions can anchor the work of community-based educators and help bring together the diverse experiences of students in the community.

Clearly, community-based educators need to have explicit discussions about the purpose of their projects, the language they will use, and the contexts in which they want to frame classroom and community work. It is essential that this planning is prioritized. Having a collective sense of purpose well understood by students, faculty, administrators, and community members helps everyone involved collaborate in productive, meaningful ways. Students understand the significance of their experiences and how to contextualize them within larger discourses of community health and sustainability. Faculty know how to help students make those connections through meaningful discussions, reflective opportunities, and supplemental resources. Community members better understand their role as mentors, volunteer coordinators and resources and can provide better opportunities for authentic involvement. And administrators can do the important work of eliminating structural and logistical barriers between schools and communities.

_Logicics and flexibility._
Meaningful community-based education requires schools, teachers and students to become active participants in community life. The Human Services Program at Jefferson
Center was well equipped to handle the logistics of community participation. The small-school-within-a-school structure allowed for a localized administration and small team of teachers who could easily manage students’ class time in order to accommodate fieldwork. The school was part of a district and city that encouraged students to utilize public transportation. This made it possible for students to easily, cheaply, and reliably access various sites throughout Riverside. And with a flexible team of 12th grade teachers, entire class schedules could be modified on short notice to take advantage of learning opportunities outside of school. Although the central administration at Jefferson Center was not directly involved with the Second Tuesday Project, it allowed the Human Services Program administration the freedom to send students into the field throughout the school day which made a significant impact on what the program was able to accomplish.

Educators, administrators and community members pursuing community-based education must find unique ways to address the structural and temporal barriers separating schools and communities. Whether it be through transportation funding, flexible academic schedules or increased student responsibility and independence, the framework determining appropriate learning environments needs to be revised to authentically integrate schools and communities.

Community-based education in the classroom.
Even with its struggles, the Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson Center demonstrated the relevance and potential of community-based practices in schools. Students were exposed first-hand to a diversity of issues present in their local community and actively experienced the day-to-day workings of agencies related to those issues.
Through their own research and experiences shared with classmates, students became aware of a variety of community social, cultural, economic and environmental issues. Their experiences were not as well developed as they could have been but some students were able to move from their experiential insights to broader understandings about Riverside communities and issues. In these cases, students explored the social, economic, cultural, and environmental implications of their community issues and proposed potential solutions.

For educators wanting to incorporate community-based curricula, Jefferson Center’s Second Tuesday Project demonstrates that there is a wealth of learning potential in the community. Community-based education can be a powerful approach for schools hoping to engage students in the life of the community. To do it well and make it meaningful, community-based education requires a balance of theory and practice, a clear sense of purpose and mission, and well-organized logistics supporting the collaboration between students, schools and the community.
Chapter 4 – Participants’ Geographies

My second research question focuses on participants’ geographies - how young people in the study experience, describe, and interpret their environments. To answer this question, I developed case studies with eight participating students through individual interviews and their participation in five focus group sessions. In this chapter, I will describe these case studies in two parts. First, I will describe four case studies of individual students’ geographies of place - their perspectives, experiences, and interpretations of home, school, neighborhood and city. Then, I will conduct a cross case analysis of participants’ geographies, identifying overarching themes and trends present in students’ collective geographies. Finally, I will describe the implications of students’ geographies for educators.

The four case studies presented below were selected from the eight cases because they were the most detailed and developed accounts due to the considerable depth of data I had from these four participants. Central to each case study is a sensitivity to students’ unique, embodied, and partial perspectives, their distinctive standpoints influenced by their raced, classed, and gendered experiences. Each case is divided into two parts, “Landscape,” information about students’ day-to-day lives, and “Themes,” some of the broader, more complex issues and ideas prevalent in their geographies.

Case Studies

Kayla-Jean

Landscapes.
Kayla-Jean lives with both her parents in Southwood, a lower-middle class neighborhood six miles from Jefferson Center High School. Both of Kayla-Jean’s
parents are African-American. She has two older brothers who no longer live at home. Kayla-Jean is a focused and driven student, well-loved by her teachers for her strong work ethic and positive attitude. She is a member of the National Honor Society and Student Government and she will graduate as valedictorian of her class. Michaels explains her success this way, “Kayla-Jean is a really hard working student, she’s not as gifted as some other students intellectually but she just keeps working at it, keeps plugging away.” Patterson, who always mentions Kayla-Jean’s name with an enthusiastic, “God, I love that girl,” explains that when other students complain about missed deadlines and forgotten assignments, Kayla-Jean has already turned in her second or third draft of the assignment. Her classmates like and respect Kayla-Jean; they jokingly describe her as “one of the smart ones” and she is always an enthusiastic participant in the class’ social activities.

Kayla-Jean has traveled out of state a few times, once to attend a family funeral in Texas, another time on a short family trip to Chicago, and more recently she visited a number of southern states as part of a school-sponsored college tour. She remembers feeling intimidated by the big city and large college campuses and was reluctant throughout her travels to try regional foods, swim in hotel pools, and talk to locals. She highlighted the weather on her travels (“too hot,” “too windy, “too humid”) and was always relieved to get back home again. Home, for Kayla-Jean is her “fortress, a place that protects me from the outside world – warm and safe…where I can relax and just breathe.” Nonetheless, Kayla-Jean is looking forward to college and hopes to take advantage of study abroad programs. She plans to attend a public university two hours from Riverside where she has received significant scholarships. She dreams of traveling
to Paris, taking her mother to Bora Bora, and meeting more people like the Brazilian exchange student at Jefferson Center whom she was delighted to befriend this year.

Kayla-Jean describes her Southwood neighborhood as “full of young kids who behave badly and adults who look tired and worn out.” She says Southwood feels hostile because of frequent police patrols. “I do not hang out in Southwood, I do not feel safe in my neighborhood.” She explains,

I’m really scared to walk up the street by myself. There are a lot of pedophiles...there is this apartment complex that held pedophiles and we kept getting these announcement cards that there was a pedophile in the neighborhood and it would list the address and it was super close.

Kayla-Jean doesn’t know many people in the neighborhood, only her classmates who ride the same bus after school. She works at the Southwood K-Mart, part of a strip mall where she goes in her free time to shop, eat, and watch movies. Her neighborhood is predominantly African-American; surrounding neighborhoods are also working-class though some are more racially diverse than Southwood.

Kayla-Jean moved to Southwood when she was 13. Before then, she lived with her parents and brothers in Eastside, a middle-class neighborhood across town. She describes Eastside and her childhood there:

I used to go places with my brothers, they used to take me to the park when we lived in Eastside, the nicer area near Eastside Park where all the White people live and I didn’t really have to worry about anything because we knew everybody. We’d be walking around and people were all really friendly – it was fun, there is a YMCA down there, but I don’t get that anymore. Everybody is so angry in my neighborhood.

Kayla-Jean feels strongly connected to Riverside; she cheers for the city’s major league baseball team and incorporates positive images of Riverside’s downtown skyline and the large Middlesmith River in her visual depictions of the city. Still, she is growing
“bored with Riverside,” anxious for college and a change of scenery. Undecided as to career paths or plans post-college, she supposes she’ll return to live in Riverside as she anticipates “missing home and feeling homesick.”

Kayla-Jean describes herself as an “old lady.” She hangs out at the Bingo Hall with her mom and Aunt (“You have to be 18 to go there but I go there all the time, I even have a membership card they gave me”) and spends weekends at either the Southwood or the Downtown Riverside library. She preferred the much larger downtown library prior to its recent remodel because “I used to be able to go straight to the books I loved but now they moved it all – it is all spread out. I go there now and wonder where all the African-American books are.” She spends her free Sundays reading all day, much to the dismay of her mother. Kayla-Jean jokingly describes their dialogue: “My mom gives me a hard time, “You are a bookworm.” I’m like, “No, I’m a scholar.”

For her Second Tuesday Project, Kayla-Jean’s interest in African-American literature and culture led her to the Riverside Black Theater Company, a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving African-American art in the community. Kayla-Jean describes the organization’s purpose as promoting “the heritage of Black art, its African influences, and how it is represented in the community.” As part of the project, she met with operational staff, attended productions and auditions, and helped with promotional efforts for upcoming company projects. The office of the theater company is located near Southwood and Kayla-Jean’s parents accompanied her to weekend or evening events at other locations.
Themes.

There are two significant forces shaping Kayla-Jean’s geography. Her parents, influenced by their economic capabilities and concerns for her safety, have directly impacted the places Kayla-Jean has access to, her feelings about various locations, and the meaning she derives from them. Additionally, Kayla-Jean’s interest in African-American culture and history – supported by her family, her independent studies, and her school studies - has strongly impacted the way she views her community.

Kayla-Jean frequently uses the term “restricted” when discussing her life. The youngest member of her family and only child still living at home, her parents are very protective: “My parents are very strict, my dad is really strict with me – I’m the only girl.” Kayla-Jean’s mom became pregnant with her eldest brother at 17 and her parents are adamant that Kayla-Jean not follow in their footsteps. They don’t let her date, go to house parties, or go with her friends to the city’s teen night clubs. Kayla-Jean is open in regards to her beliefs about sex and indirectly about the role her parents have played in shaping her views. Here, she simultaneously attributes her virginity to being “restricted” by her parents and to personally choosing to defy peer pressure and stereotypes of Black teens:

Amazingly, I’m still a virgin, that always amazes people, they are like, “You are not” and I’m like “Yes, I am.” All the boys know – that’s why the boys don’t mess with me. They mess with some of the other girls but not me, I’m just restricted, I’m not like that…. I think that’s another norm I don’t follow, another stereotype – I’m breaking that assumption.

Because of the sexual offenders living in her neighborhood, Kayla-Jean’s father started walking her to the school bus every morning in middle school and eventually started driving her to school. Kayla-Jean does not have her driver’s license, and her parents do not allow her to use the city bus system for any purpose other than riding
home immediately after school on a city bus designated for Jefferson Center students. Instead, Kayla-Jean’s parents drive her to and from all after school activities, her job at K-Mart, the library on weekends, and any recreational or shopping activities. Although she takes a few college courses during the school day as part of a joint program with Riverside University and Jefferson Center, her parents do not allow her to visit the Riverside University campus for after-school activities because of a concern for her safety. Kayla-Jean explains that her parents’ rules are based on media reports of campus crimes, rapes, shootings, and fights at house parties. Additionally, personal experience informs her parents’ restrictions. Kayla-Jean described how her brother was robbed walking in Bridgedale and when she and her parents went to pick him up they were threatened by a group of young men on the street corner flashing hand guns.

When deciding on a high school four years ago, Kayla-Jean’s parents bypassed their neighborhood high school for Jefferson Center because they thought it would be stronger academically. They signed her up for the Paideia program, considered at the time to be the most academically challenging and best college preparatory program at Jefferson Center. Kayla-Jean’s parents have high academic expectations for her and support them with their actions. They provide daily transportation to school and home from after-school activities, they accompany her on Second Tuesday Project days and communicate with her frequently about school, work, activities and her future. During after-school focus group sessions, Kayla-Jean talked to her parents via cell phone at least two, often three times. Kayla-Jean’s parents are able to provide this level of support because of their strong commitment to Kayla-Jean’s success and their economic resources. With two working parents, two vehicles, and no other children at home,
Kayla-Jean’s parents enable her active school and work schedules without compromising their standards for her safety and academic success.

Although she complains about their restrictions, Kayla-Jean values the support and direction of her parents. She believes their firm guidance encourages good decision-making and helps her become a strong and capable person. She is looking forward to being out from under their direct influence when she attends college, but is not pushing the issue. “I’m not anxious for that moment [when she leaves home], I used to be anxious but now I want everything to go easy and smooth without any hostility between me and my parents.” To this end, Kayla-Jean does not challenge her parents’ rules and restrictions but respects them with an eye on the calendar for the freedom that college will provide.

Kayla-Jean’s parents and extended family have also been influential in fostering her interest in African-American culture and history. An aunt in Texas sends her books written by African-American authors, her grandmother shares memories about discrimination from Whites and Blacks because of her dark complexion, and her mother encouraged Kayla-Jean to contact the Riverside Black Theater Company for her Second Tuesday Project. Throughout her teens Kayla-Jean has been interested in African-American culture and community as demonstrated by her love of books by African-American authors. Paired with her experiences at the Riverside Black Theater Company, these interests have strongly shaped her views of her African-American culture and community.

Kayla-Jean views the Riverside Black Theater Company as a positive organization trying to create a more unified Black community in Riverside. She
describes doing promotional work with the organization at the Black Family Reunion, an annual festival of community and culture in Riverside. Kayla-Jean was surprised at the way the festival positively and peacefully celebrated African-American culture. “I was just passing out flyers but also talking to people and seeing people together. There weren’t any fights, shootings. People were performing, open word, singing, it was fun.”

Although she feels that they contribute positively to the community, Kayla-Jean also thinks the Riverside Black Theater Company fails to make critical connections with some members of the Black community. She was frustrated the company didn’t take on more inner-city issues like drug addiction and violence and felt that they did not include all socio-economic levels of the African-American community in performances.

The audience, the people that come to the plays, they are high class people. They have to have money to attend, that’s how the company raises money. I noticed they have a lot of little advertisements like “donate here,” “sponsor us here.” I wonder why they aren’t reaching out to the lower income people, poor people need to get exposed to this too so they can get involved, volunteer, help out – and they can actually build career skills from that. It’s similar to another thing I read in a book, some African-American artists have written about this – the profit – and how some artists are profiting off of their work but that it should more be about the art and your talents, not something that costs.

Experiences with the Riverside Black Theater Company and her research into African-American art and community have significantly impacted the way Kayla-Jean views her community. She describes this year as a turning point in her level of community understanding,

I don’t hate my race at all but I used to think that we were so ignorant; I don’t mean that in a negative way. I used to be so unaware, but now I see what the problem is, where the problem starts and how different community organizations try to help out. My experiences this year allowed me to see how my community functions. And I see it everyday – I’m around people who are just disrespectful and it’s sad because all we
are doing is disrespecting each other and we should be uplifting each other.

Kayla-Jean explains that the source of negativity in the African-American community is a combination of political, economic, social, and emotional contexts. She talks about the lack of respect among African-American youth glamorized in popular music and media, “I see how the influence of music impacts how we behave towards others in our community. I think rap artists… are destroying the aesthetics of Black culture and the meaning of the arts.” She also cites a breakdown in supportive family structure and the negative influence of peers when it comes to drugs, violence, and sex. Reflecting on the economic conditions of her family, friends, and neighbors, she explains:

I feel that most of my African-American community in Riverside, those of us living in poverty or the middle class, seem maxed out because people work everyday living paycheck to paycheck with a salary and they can’t afford a good living for themselves and they don’t get to enjoy everything that people from higher classes do.

Kayla-Jean attributes many of the problems she sees in her community to issues of Black identity. She defines identity as the answer to the question, “Where do I belong in my community?” As she grapples with the question herself, Kayla-Jean draws on knowledge of her cultural heritage for answers. She explains,

Black identity is essential to how we are today – it’s needed now because if we don’t know who we are, who we were, or what we went through then how can we consider ourselves as a race, as a whole? How can we impact America, how do we know where we stand in society? I’m interested in how we express ourselves through art, music, writing, literature – these are all tools that represent us throughout history, like the Harlem Renaissance and the Civil Rights movement.

Kayla-Jean feels that there is a disconnect between community problems caused by a lack of cultural identity and solutions offered by organizations like the Riverside Black Theater Company. She describes that missing link as a “bubble:”
In Riverside, you just live your life. People get stuck on one mindset. It’s all about them. But they have to realize it’s not just about what’s going on with them, it what’s going on around them. If not, they just put themselves in a bubble…and people don’t get involved with anything, they just stick to their bubble and don’t take the risk of doing something new and growing, they think, “I’m just too afraid.”

Her solution to solving this “identity crisis” is to learn one’s history, and get involved in one’s community in positive ways.

Black youth should go out and get involved in our community to find out more about who we are as a race. We should know who we are and not feel alienated or left out by our own past. It is essential in knowing the contributions of our ancestors because it is a part of who we are as a race. The arts are what define us and it is part of what makes us unique as a whole.

What is particularly interesting about Kayla-Jean’s descriptions of her community’s challenges and potential solutions is that she uses much of the same language and imagery to describe her own process of identity formation to locate herself within her community. Kayla-Jean initially described feeling tired and bored with Riverside,

I feel like I’m ready to get out of Riverside, ready for a new environment. It is time for me to leave, it is not fresh to me anymore, it is all worn out like a pair of jeans – just throw them away.

But when asked to explain, she attributed this boredom to the fact that “I never really got involved. I just never paid attention.” She described the many community activities advertised on local radio stations and weekly news magazines that she either never really noticed or couldn’t afford to attend. Kayla-Jean explains that eventually, after college, she wants to come back to Riverside and “get involved in all these things” but explains that it takes money and time. Revisiting the concept of a “bubble,” she describes her location at this moment in her life and community:
I want to do so much eventually. But right now I’m just trying to keep myself focused, sort of keep myself in a bubble. And when I actually pop out and really look around me, I’ll be amazed that all this has been going on all this time. It won’t be too late for me to actually get involved and actually build something.

Kayla-Jean’s geography is in transition. She simultaneously views Riverside as a tiresome, restrictive environment and as an active, opportunity-rich environment - if one takes the initiative to get involved. She sees her African-American community struggling economically, socially, and culturally but with a rich heritage and community organizations that can help transform it positively. As she prepares for college away from home, Kayla-Jean finds herself negotiating a move out of the safe “fortress” and “bubble” she and her parents have created and into a vibrant, identity-affirming community. She envisions placing herself firmly in this community through active cultural scholarship, community participation, and engaged citizenship. She doesn’t know the path exactly, she is unclear about careers and majors, but has a general sense of direction and certainly a strong inner guide.

I’m going to have to study something in college related to my African-American heritage. I need to get to that. I want to learn more about it, experience it. Up to now I’ve just been picking from here and there. Just because I’m Black doesn’t mean I’ve learned everything.

Dana

*Landscapes.*

Dana is a highly active, involved and enthusiastic student. A member of the high school’s drama club, volleyball team, softball team, cheerleading squad, National Honor Society and student government, she is a very busy student. She is also a willing participant in just about any activity the school can offer,
I was in the Salsa Dancing club; I love to learn new things. I would love to learn Ballroom Dance but they stopped that club because there were not enough people. I’ve done Yoga at school – that was so relaxing, such a relief, I loved it.

Dana is taking a few courses for college credit through a joint program with the Riverside University and is successful academically. Michaels describes her this way:

We gave Dana the “Ms. Wonderwoman Award” at the end of year celebration because she does everything. She is a bundle of energy, always upbeat. I’ve never ever seen her upset about anything. She always is able to make light of things, she takes a joke and gives a joke, she is very talented athletically, academically…she is always in the top 5% if not the top 3% of her class.

Dana describes herself similarly, “I am always upbeat, always strong… I’m a very bubbly person and almost always have a positive attitude.” She loves her busy life and schedule because it forces her to manage her time, “it keeps me focused and busy, it’s a challenge, a goal to strive for. And I love the many friends I make in the process.” Dana is well-loved by her classmates and is usually at the center of uproarious laughter, jokes, or celebrations. Dana’s positive outlook pervades every aspect of her life and connection to her community.

Dana lives with her parents, her mom who is African-American like Dana, and her step-dad who is White. They live in Rose Manor, a well integrated lower-middle class neighborhood about seven miles from Jefferson Center High School. Dana describes her neighborhood as “boring and quiet.”

You hear about Bridgedale and Harper Ridge and everything going on over there. Rose Manor is just down the street and you hear gun shots farther away in the middle of the night and you get scared but there’s a police station right across the street from the park. There’s one street in Rose Manor that is like the “hood street” with all the dilapidated houses and all the bad kids – I don’t want to say “bad kids” but where all the troubled kids are, and that’s about it. I feel real safe, especially on my street because it’s real quiet. Right across the street there’s a church and a
Dana describes her home as “a place where I feel safe and loved, where memories are made.” Very comfortable there, she says, “I love my home, I could spend every day at my house. It is where my mom, step dad and I all come together and bond.”

Dana’s parents are clearly a significant factor in her life, creating a loving and comfortable home environment. Dana attributes her positive attitude and upbeat nature to her mom who “is super positive… she is never mad. Even when she is, she just smiles it off and looks to a brighter day.” Weekdays Dana is busy with school, sports, and clubs but every Friday night her family has a “family night” where they play games together and rent or go out to the movies. Her family’s favorite place is Wal-Mart. “We spend like every day there. My dad can shop there for hours. He is a Walmart-aholic.” Dana gets around town via city buses or catches rides with her parents.

With her friends or family, Dana enjoys visiting local bowling alleys, restaurant/arcades, and both indoor and outdoor amusement and water parks. She likes Riverside and though she’ll attend college next year a three hour drive away, she can’t imagine calling any other place home, “Riverside’s nice, it is not as hustle and bustle as bigger cities, it has a city taste to it but a country sweetness. I like it here. I don’t think I’ll move away.” A very active person, she likes that there are things to do in Riverside:

Maybe I like Riverside because it is the only thing I know, because all my family is here… but there is always something opening up in Riverside, there’s always something new to do – now they have that new game center at Valley North Mall, and Four Towers just got bought by Marshall Amusements so they are going to put in new rides….it is like one big, big little city – it is just nice. And the weather is OK for me. I hate the hot and the cold but there is a nice balance here and I know when I go north to school I’m going to freeze and have to get a big coat, and I know if I were
to go south I’d be too hot and I just hate it when it’s hot. So Riverside has nice weather.

Though usually positive and upbeat, Dana is fairly negative about the day-to-day places where she spends her time. Most importantly, she explains, “I hate the bus.” She also feels unsafe in the neighborhood surrounding Jefferson Center, and describes feeling “frustrated, sad, and bored” at school, “because of the people.” Dana doesn’t like visiting city parks or forests, “I don’t like the woods. I don’t like to touch furry animals.” Still, she considers some of the larger county parks and lakes beautiful and peaceful but is frustrated that they are located far from the city center and difficult to get to. She feels the city needs more youth night clubs and is frustrated with the fact that most are in suburban areas and not on city bus routes. Reflecting on the places she visits in Riverside and her generally negative or critical feelings about them, she laments that “it’s hard to get my positive out.”

One place she does like, though feels somewhat guilty about, is the Internet. She says she spends “way too much time online” and is “addicted” to her favorite sites: MySpace, YouTube, Facebook, FunnyJunk. Dana avoids chat rooms because she is nervous about the threat of sexual predators.

Dana works at Four Towers, a large outdoor amusement park in a neighboring town, 16 miles from her neighborhood, Rose Manor. Dana takes the bus there in the morning “I have to wake up earlier than for school!” and her parents pick her up in the evenings. Over 4000 young people from miles around and even a few hundred international students work at Four Towers in the summer, making it a very diverse group of employees. Dana considers it a very positive place where she is free to have honest and respectful relationships.
I love this job. Sometimes it is frustrating but I love the people. It is so fun. If it is a rainy day and there are no visitors there we just lay back and we talk. And we have some pretty intelligent conversations and it is mind sharpening because we heed each other’s words and we actually listen and it’s not just “ugh, why are you thinking about that?” and the people there I get along with so much better than the people at school. It is so enlightening, so refreshing to have honest feedback and not ridicule for what you have to say.

Dana describes feeling “comfortable and included” at Four Towers, where she is a supervisor and responsible for a number of coworkers. A natural and well-respected leader, she is part of a small group of reliable and trusted local employees who are invited to continue working at Four Towers on weekends throughout the school year when the park is closed. By the end of the school year, Dana was recruiting classmates for positions and helped a few secure summer jobs.

For her Second Tuesday Project, Dana worked at the Riverside Urban League. There she studied a campaign trying to reduce crime in Riverside by highlighting connections between urban environments and neighborhood violence. She chose this project because the work site was located close to Rose Manor. Most of her second Tuesdays were spent in her mentor’s office looking over crime statistics and pamphlets, activities Dana described as “boring and frustrating.” The few times she went in the field with her mentor were remarkable though and changed the way she viewed the city of Riverside.

It was very interesting to see right down the street from my house where a lot of violent crime was occurring and the neighborhood was really dirty. The sidewalks were all cracked, there were potholes in the streets and land was not being used. There were so many abandoned buildings and old businesses that wouldn’t sell because of their location. There was a drive-in place that was just a hot spot for crime and it was just this little dirty teal shack. It had posters covering it and just one little window and one back door… My agency was trying to show the city how renewing some of these houses and getting businesses to follow rules about their
appearance and outside environments could reduce the crime rate. I think that it really helps a lot because some of the stores that we saw with good lighting, good windows they weren’t hit. There were no shootings by there, no drug deals, no nothing.

Dana found the links between environment and crime fascinating. She explains that the project “opened my eyes to the situation that little tiny things in a community can create really big problems.” Dana felt that the project changed the way she viewed Riverside and helped her develop a “more knowledgeable view of my city. It’s not the nice neighborhood town that I thought it was, it is not the nicest city in the world. I have more of a realistic view now.” Dana explained that in the past, when she saw trash on the street, she didn’t think much of it beyond, “they should just sweep it up!” Having looked carefully at the implications of garbage, infrastructure, housing and environmental conditions on neighborhood crime, Dana now explains that garbage on the street is just the beginning of a downward turn in neighborhood safety: “It’s like the trash on the street generates the “hood-ness” of the neighborhood.”

Themes.
When Dana reflects on her experiences and impressions of Riverside, two themes seem to thread through her narrative. First, Dana cares a great deal about the amount of power she, her peers, and her fellow citizens have in particular places. Second, she is highly sensitive to the role of racial and cultural diversity in creating safe places of respect, acceptance, and difference.

Dana describes the city of Riverside as a series of neighborhoods “segregated by choice,” although her own neighborhood, Rose Manor, is fairly diverse. Dana’s mom was sensitive to diversity issues as Dana was growing up, urging her to participate in
activities that would broaden her experiences with children of different backgrounds.

Dana describes her first real exposure to White kids as “interracial soccer:”

My mom enrolled me in soccer when I was really little, it was a long time ago and she wanted me to be aware of diversity because she knew not many Black kids played soccer. And she put me in Clear Creek (a mostly lower-middle income White neighborhood) soccer league, she wanted me to have that opportunity to meet new people...I switched to a Rose Manor team later because practice was literally across the street from my house. So it was a more diverse team, a couple of Black people, a couple of mixed, a couple of Whites, a couple of Hispanics. It was pretty nice. Soccer made me feel like we are all equal – there was no color boundary there. I’ve been playing with White people forever so there’s really no difference between them and me.

Dana values diversity highly and is most fond of places where it is the accepted norm. At Four Towers, where she works alongside young people from all over the Riverside region and world, Dana feels more comfortable and included than at school where she is surrounded by predominantly African-American youth from Riverside. She attributes this comfort to the respect and honesty that exists between Four Towers employees and to their shared experiences working through busy, lazy, or hot days and managing park visitors. Dana explains that in places like Four Towers, where park visitors share the thrill of amusement park rides, skin color becomes irrelevant:

They have such good rides there that you don’t even worry about people’s color at Four Towers. I’m not worried that I’m going to be uncomfortable with this White person standing next to me. I’m worried that I’m going to die on the Delerium!

Dana feels that at school, where most of the students share racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, students try to differentiate themselves based on things she considers trivial and irrelevant, like clothing.

At school, if you aren’t wearing Timberlands or Gucci, everyone is like, “Oooh, what is she wearing? She’s got those knock-off brands…” You aren’t free to be yourself because you are scared someone is going to start
talking about you and when they start talking about you it just snowballs into something so much greater.

When pressed on how this negative social environment could be changed, Dana offers,

I think there should be more programs out there that integrate the schools, like a district wide STP project where students from all over come together to do school-wide community service programs…it would open you up to a whole group of different people.

Dana’s parents are an interracial couple. They have chosen to live in one of the few diverse neighborhoods in Riverside. Dana’s mom made efforts at a young age to get Dana involved in soccer in order for her to be around people of different races and try a sport African-American girls in their community typically did not play. Through her positive experiences working with diverse colleagues at Four Towers and her discomfort with the insular and critical social environment at Jefferson Center, it is clear that Dana is comfortable in environments where people of diverse backgrounds share positive, productive experiences. For her, these have been “eye-opening,” “mind-sharpening” environments. These are places she can be true to herself, confident, and positive.

Dana also thinks about places in terms of power. She is most positive about places in her life where she has some control over how she presents herself and how she interacts with others. She is sensitive to how others utilize time and space and is often critical of places where she feels people and places are being disrespected.

Dana prides herself on her ability to organize her weekly schedule, and busily fills it with after school and work activities. When discussing her busy schedule and all the places she has to be in a typical week, she explains,

I think it’s a good time management skill because you learn you have to break your time into this, that and the other. When you finally get rest time it’s like, “god, I deserve this” it is amazing. I don’t see how people just go home after school. You have another four to six hours and
homework doesn’t take all those hours unless you have some big paper or something. I think that’s why I do it, the time management, it keeps me focused and busy. It is like a goal to strive for.

Though she includes the Valley North Mall as one of the places she enjoys visiting, she also describes feeling uncomfortable there. She explains,

I’m uncomfortable at the mall, I just feel like I don’t belong, like everybody is staring at me…I love going to the mall because I love to shop. I just like going around but there are so many people! I like to be with my friends when it is kind of empty in the mall.

She attributes part of her discomfort to being around groups of teenagers - mostly African-American - who act inappropriately at the mall. “When you see a whole bunch of teenagers acting out, I don’t like it. I don’t like how my generation acts and I’m ashamed to be associated with them.” Dana is frustrated that patrons of the mall judge her based on the disrespectful behavior of other Black teens simply because she is a Black teen.

As a counterpoint, on the softball field Dana feels “powerful and strong.” She explains, “I love the softball field. It is different there. I feel I’m flushed out. Softball is something I’m good at; I am talented so it gives me a confidence boost when I’m out on the field.” Capitalizing on her strengths, Dana explains that on the softball field she has the opportunity to “rise above the occasion,” to positively demonstrate her character and abilities. Dana describes how her team was able to maintain their composure during a particularly heated game that they eventually lost after being subjected to intense heckling and unsportsmanlike conduct from the other team:

The people you play and how you take some of the garbage that is thrown at you shows the type of team you are. We are strong, we could have won that game if we’d had a pitcher, but it just shows you that we are strong. We kept our heads focused, throughout all that mess. It shows you that you can rise above the occasion. We didn’t tolerate it [the negativity from
the other team]. We just blacked it all out and we played our game. We never said anything back to them. We would do our own cheers, for our people and they just got infuriated that we ignored their ignorance.

Dana is also critical of the inconsistencies she sees in how power is used by teachers and administrators at school. She argues that faculty “need to ease up” on students eating and drinking in the hallways. She explains that many students do not have time to eat breakfast at home so they pick food up on the way to school. Shuffled immediately to the auditorium upon arrival and restricted from eating there, Dana is frustrated because,

You have all this time in the auditorium before the bell rings and the teachers want you to wait with your food. Then, if you eat on your way to class, they are all like, “That’s a detention – that’s a detention!”

Dana is extremely dismayed by the incongruous fact that faculty freely hand out detentions for eating in the hallway but are not willing to discipline students acting up in class and disrupting the learning process, “When you are trying to learn in class and someone is acting up the teachers only say, “Just be quiet, just be quiet.” And I’m thinking, “No! Send them out of the classroom!” That makes me so mad.”

It is because of these power dynamics that Dana describes feeling “sad, frustrated and weak” at school. “It’s the people in the building” she explains, who make it such a negative place. Her inability to “get her positive out” at school is a testament to the lack of power and control Dana feels as a student subject to inconsistent rules and expectations and a critical peer social environment.

Dana is sensitive to issues of power and agency in the wider community as well. Describing whether or not she thinks the efforts of her organization will make a
difference, she describes the importance of citizens’ agency, choices, and willingness to make change.

I do feel like my agency can succeed at some things, but some people are not going to clean up their yard, some people are not going to cut their shrubs every year, they aren’t going to do what the agency recommends. Others, if they get the word out, actually will. So it is sort of a give and take, you can give the information and people can choose to take it or not. I think they have a pretty good plan on their hands if they can just get the word out there and get it to everybody and make everybody see that this is necessary to having a safe neighborhood. And they have to make people want a safe neighborhood. Because you have all these teenagers running around like “I’m hood, I’m hood – I’ve got the gun in my waist” and everything. And it’s like, you couldn’t bust a grape in a food fight. It is really important to get the teenagers and the 20-year-olds to see that the life of crime is not a beautiful life. That there is always another choice…some people just don’t see that.

Finally, Dana demonstrates an emerging awareness of the politics of city planning based on her experiences throughout the city. She laments the fact that city bus routes do not permit users access to many of the large county parks in Riverside which include expansive green spaces, lakes, and multi-use recreation areas. She is acutely aware of the fact that the majority of youth night clubs are also inaccessible by bus, forcing patrons to have the economic advantage of access to a personal vehicle. Through her Second Tuesday Project research and her own experience of Riverside neighborhoods, she is critical of the way the city prioritizes areas for development and maintenance. She explains how her perspective of the city has changed,

Usually walking down the street I wouldn’t pay any attention to the housing, I would just think, “Oh, that’s just another dilapidated house.” But now I look at it like that’s one dilapidated house that isn’t going to get fixed up and there’s another one run down next to it and it makes me think the neighborhood is going south. And if the city isn’t doing anything about it then it is going to turn into another hot spot for gang violence. Like walking downtown. I don’t like walking downtown at night, I don’t even go there that much except for fairs and festivals. Going downtown you see a lot of trash on the streets and you think, this is downtown
Riverside! If we don’t get this cleaned up, then our downtown is in jeopardy of becoming one of those dilapidated parts. I know that Central Square downtown took a lot of planning and for the most part they keep it clean, it is a nice spot for people to come and hang out, especially if you are from out of town, it’s really nice. But if you go deeper into other nearby neighborhoods the scenery goes south from there.

Though a very positive and upbeat person, it is clear that Dana has a complex view of her neighborhood, community, and city. She is critical about the lack of diversity in her school and Riverside’s neighborhoods and lauds places in her life where racial and cultural diversity is the norm. She is acutely aware of her own power in the places she inhabits and is frustrated in sites like school and the mall where Dana feels she is misrepresented and disrespected because of unfair policies or the stereotypical perceptions of others. She feels most powerful and in control on the softball field and at work, places where she can be herself, show respect and be respected, and display her talents. Dana is sensitive to the choices her peers and neighbors make creating clean and safe environments or envisioning and living more positive and sustaining lifestyles. Finally, she is concerned with larger issues of city planning in terms of transportation access to recreation sites and the maintenance and development of Riverside’s neighborhoods and landmarks. Dana’s personal experiences with diversity and a growing awareness of how power and economics shapes environments contribute to her enthusiastic but “realistic” view of her community.

**Briana**

*Landscapes.*

Briana lives with her African-American single mother and younger brother in Rose Manor, where they moved at the end of the 2007-2008 school year. Before the move, she lived in Lincoln Heights, a mostly lower-middle class African-American
neighborhood seven miles from Jefferson Center. Occasionally, Briana spends time at her father’s house but explains that, “I respect him because without him there wouldn’t be me. But he’s just not around, he’s never been around.” Briana is a kind, concerned and engaging student. She is passionate about her life experiences and opinions of Riverside and is very willing to share them both. An enthusiastic storyteller, Briana has rich narratives about the places she has lived and the ways she experiences them.

Briana describes Lincoln Heights, her home for 17 years, as a violent neighborhood,

When I was little, I thought the kids were thugs and the streets were dirty. The police were everywhere and there were always guys on the bridge selling drugs – always. Once I got older it seemed to get a little better but then my friend got shot. He was spending the night at someone’s house and somebody walked in and shot him in the head. He was set up by his friends. And these are people I grew up playing jump rope and hopscotch and racing bikes with. I decided I didn’t really want to be there. I spent a lot of time at my cousin’s house, I would stay inside, or I’d spend all weekend at the mall. I didn’t want to be outside because it was not a good environment, it was really violent.

She tells another story about the neighborhood to demonstrate how unsafe she felt for her family, mostly her brother.

When we were little, my brother got in trouble because a dope dealer who used to hang on one of the streets we lived on told my brother to give a bag to somebody who was in a car. And my brother ran over, he couldn’t have been more than seven, ran over and gave the bag to the guy in the car. When he got back to the dealer, the dope dealer gave my brother two 20-dollar bills and told him to buy all of his friends some candy. So he went to the store and came back with 15 dollars worth of junk food and he came back to the house and my mama was like, “Where did you get the money for this?” And he told my mom what happened and my mom got really upset and she got on my brother really bad. I think that was the first time my brother ever really got punished. She was nowhere near lenient with him. There was no TV, no anything. She wanted him to really understand…she did that to get it into his head that running errands for the dope dealers was bad. And now my brother goes out to the basketball courts in Lincoln Heights and the dealers try to stop and talk to him like,
“You can get money if you do this, you can get money if you do that” and he tries to tell them no and they get mad. They think you are talking to the police. Those guys out there, they are horrible. Last year my brother was jumped at those basketball courts.

Briana was relieved when her mom, brother and she moved to Rose Manor. She feels that it will be a more secure move for her brother, “I will feel much safer for my brother after dark… In Rose Manor the guys are different. He can go play basketball and not worry about being jumped.” It will also be a better environment for her mother, “It’s quiet, it is so calm. It’s the perfect neighborhood for my mom because she’s calm, she’s soothing. She doesn’t like all the violence, the animosity and stuff.”

Briana gets to school and around town via the city bus. She likes school, describes feeling “included” there. Briana describes her classmates as good friends and as they were approaching graduation, was genuinely proud of their achievements,

I have seen so many of my friends grow and change, they have matured. These are not little girls and boys anymore, these are men and women who are responsible, who are very intelligent. Even though I thought last year some of them were not going to make it.

Michaels describes Briana as a “mother hen, looking out for the little chicks - the other seniors - making sure that everybody is doing what they are supposed to do.” He also explains that Briana, though a dedicated hard worker, at times,

…just comes in and she is so tired and frustrated that she comes in and puts her head down on the desk and you know when you ask her to sit up that she’s almost ready to explode. She works far too many hours at Smith’s grocery store. We had our senior reflection and hers was the “Ms. Smith’s Award” for the person who tried as best as she could to fit her schooling into her Smith’s work schedule.

Briana agrees, “I’m always at work.” She likes some of the perks of her job, especially rotating through the coffee counter: “I work all the different departments at the store; Starbucks is my favorite because I get all the free drinks I want.” Still, Briana describes
feeling “nervous, frustrated and sad” at work because of a lack of trust from her managers. “The management sends shoppers to follow us with hidden cameras. You go to your manager’s office and you look at yourself on the TV – they want to see how your performance is at work.”

When she has free time, Briana likes to hang out at Riverside University because, “I feel smart when I’m over there with the college students.” This year, she has been “exercising my right to be 18” and hanging out at some of the teen and young adult night clubs though she is careful to avoid others because she considers them to be hotspots for violence. She also avoids the neighborhood around Jefferson Center and explains that she feels nervous there because a friend was shot at a gas station three blocks from the high school campus and across the street from the university.

Briana enjoys bowling with friends, hanging out at the mall and the Banks, an outdoor mall across the Middlesmith River in the neighboring state. She explains that, The Banks is the only place I feel comfortable hanging with all of my friends. Like my friends that go to Maple Grove High School, my White friends…I take my friends over there, my friends from junior high that are Black and we meet up with my friends who are White and we have a ball down there, nobody looks at us funny - over here everybody thinks there is something wrong with that.

Briana describes feeling uncomfortable in Riverside malls or neighborhood theaters with friends who are White because they get “funny looks” from other patrons. She likes Four Towers Amusement Park because like the Banks, she is comfortable there; she describes a sense of camaraderie between patrons no matter their race. “You’ll be in line talking to your friends, “Oh I am so scared to get on this ride” and there will be 10 people in front of you saying, “We are scared too! Let’s all hold hands!”” Briana often shares stories about times she and her Black girlfriends met up with groups of White boys
and spent the entire day running around with them, sharing rides, food and adventures. By the end of the day she explains, “You get off rides and have built up a posse of like 50 people that you are running around with - most you don’t even know!”

Earlier this year, Briana was deeply moved by a local story of a child murdered by his foster parents. She decided to research foster care for her Second Tuesday Project. She explains that she wanted to “learn how and why people help foster kids.” To this end, she spent time at a local non-profit organization that trains and employs case workers and volunteer mentors to support children in the foster care system. She described her research and observations there as “inspirational;” they reinforced her decision to major in social work in college.

Having lived in Riverside all her life and traveled out of state only a few times, Briana describes the city as “kind of gloomy” but “OK when the sun’s out.” She loves the many parks with overlooks of the Middlesmith River and Riverside’s downtown. Briana feels that even if they are trashed, the city parks and the region’s forests, rivers, and hills are beautiful, peaceful, and help her feel “relaxed and calm.” She fondly remembers hikes in the parks on school field trips and wading in park fountains as a child with her mom. She also loves the city’s historical buildings and how the downtown lights reflect on the river at night.

Themes.
Briana’s geography can be described through two distinct themes: places as peaceful or violent and places as inclusive or exclusive. The former tend to come from Briana’s personal experiences and narratives of place, and the latter from her sense of
agency within a location. These themes highlight how she locates herself in the world as an adolescent and how and where she intends to direct her life.

For Briana, much of her world can be described based on the amount of social tension or violence present in a place. When asked to describe home, she describes the nature of her relationships with her family. Though she describes her mom as “my buddy,” they argue a lot. “We are close but we are not. We go back and forth a lot. She’s raised some strong-headed kids so if she says something, we get into it. Right now we kind of butt heads.” Briana says she feels “strong” at home but it is not necessarily a bastion of peace; she complains that even though they don’t live there, “All my other brothers and sisters come over and get on my nerves all the time.” And although she spends some time at her father’s house, she does not have a positive relationship with him and feels negatively about being at his house.

It’s my dad that I really don’t get along with. We are not cool, we are not anything. I respect him but honestly, I do not love him….Whenever I go over to his house, we don’t talk. Yesterday, he just said “Hi” to me when I came and “Bye” when I was leaving.

Briana considers her move from Lincoln Heights to Rose Manor this year as a move from a very loud and turbulent neighborhood to a very quiet and peaceful one. Safer for her brother, calmer for her mother, Briana is not too sure how she’ll adjust; she finds the peace of the neighborhood unsettling,

The most noise I hear over there is a dog barking. The other night it was 9:30pm and I was walking home all by myself and it was dark. I was scared because if this was a dark street in Lincoln Heights I’d be murdered or something. But there it was all quiet, except for this one dog moving around on someone’s front porch. I was scared of the dog because it was huge, but even the dogs in Rose Manor are calm. It was calm. And last night there were two kids out, maybe 12 or 14 years old and they were safe outside, just walking their dogs, calm and peaceful. It is quiet. I’m
not used to that, I’m used to gunshots and neighbors fighting and loud cars.

Briana highlights Riverside General Hospital as an important but tumultuous place in the city based on her experiences there after a violent attack on her cousin and her own stressful experiences as a patient. She described the stress of waiting with scared and agitated family members in the hospital’s E.R. after her cousin was shot. Briana also described disappointing trips to the hospital after a knee injury, “Every time I went to the hospital, they had bad news about my knee, that’s why I won’t go back there.” She had surgery as a result of the injury and remembers the experience fearfully.

When discussing important places in the city, Briana includes a number of 18-and-older nightclubs but is careful to highlight ones to avoid because they are too violent. She doesn’t like to hang out near Jefferson Center High School because she considers the neighborhood rough and violent after a friend was shot at a gas station a few blocks away. Briana feels that violence restricts youth access to recreation in the city, “We can’t go to basketball games at the city center because there is fighting, we can’t go to football games because there are people shooting at the football games – high school football games!” In her hand-drawn map of the world, Briana sketches these dangerous locations as large and as detailed as those places she frequents and considers safe (see Appendix B).

Briana argues that youth need more safe places where they can hang out and cites the success of “Basicz,” a youth center whose mission is to provide “a safe space, an empowering space, and a space for development.” According to the center’s website it helps develop young people’s interest and abilities in “Hip Hop culture – including DJ-ing, emceeing/rapping, break dancing, and graffiti art.” The center is open to youth
from throughout the city but focuses on young people who live in downtown neighborhoods. Briana explains, “I think youth should be able to showcase more of their abilities, even if it is just rap or graffiti. We should have more Basicz.” Though she speaks highly of Basicz as a positive place, Briana feels that it is not a safe recreation option because she thinks downtown is too dangerous.

I think that if we had more places like Basicz in the community, youth would be able to express themselves in different ways instead of just hanging out on the block or whatever they are going to do this summer. A lot of people are too scared to go to the one downtown though because it is downtown.

Briana perceives sites in the city as either very safe or very dangerous. Her Riverside is a combination of calm, quiet, and peaceful neighborhoods and hangouts interspersed with dangerous, violent, and scary neighborhoods, clubs, and landmarks.

Adding complexity to her geography is the way Briana perceives places as open and inclusive or closed and exclusive. She is critical of places where she feels marginalized due to her family’s values or the tenor of her personal relationships in a place. She expressed feeling “excluded” and “intimidated” as a teen in Lincoln Heights because her mom, brother and she were not a part of the drug and gang culture in the neighborhood. Briana’s poor relationship with her father makes her feel negatively about his house, and excluded in comparison with the stronger relationship he has with her brothers, “He is there for my brothers but I think that is because he has a lot more in common with them.”

Michaels described Briana as someone who is very concerned with the senior class’ fair, peaceful and cohesive social climate. He explained that she “gets upset easily” if there is any tension in the class and is keenly aware of any social injustices; she
quickly comes to the defense and aid of unfairly treated classmates. Extremely sensitive to being marginalized herself, Michaels shared a story about a rumor that Briana had divulged to school administrators the off-campus location of “senior skip day.” As a result, it was alleged, the police were called to disperse students. For a few days, the class ostracized Briana who vehemently denied any involvement. Michaels explains, “She was broken up like I’ve never seen her broken up before. She just felt like everybody hated her and was really struggling with the issue of wanting to fit in and wanting to be accepted.”

This sensitivity to injustice is not limited to Briana’s personal experiences; she is critical of the marginalization of groups of people based on race and socioeconomics. She was angry early on in the year about the fact that city voters passed a levy for the Riverside Zoo but failed to pass a levy for the public schools.

It seems like the city is spending all the money – and I don’t mean to be racist or anything – but it seems like they spend money on things that aren’t going to affect African-Americans or people in the city. Like the zoo, I don’t know a lot of poor people that go to the zoo!

Briana also criticizes new housing developments in downtown Riverside, “Out of nowhere the city puts all these new pretty buildings downtown and then they price them so high most of the people down there can’t afford to live there anymore!”

On the other hand, Briana is enthusiastic about places in the city where she feels included. Briana is very fond of the Banks and Four Towers because she feels comfortable there with her diverse groups of friends. She also loves visiting Riverside University because she likes being part of the college scene.

When you go over there, especially if you go to the student union, there is an area with lots of tables and college students just sitting around. We go over there in groups and we take our books and our homework and
upstairs there are chairs where we sit and do our work. People walk past, especially people who used to go to school here at Jefferson Center and they say, “Oh, look at these seniors from Jefferson Center, look at them sitting over here working, being smart. This is cool that you all are sitting over here doing your work. What are you working on?” It makes me feel really smart, really smart – I love it. I think that is the only thing I’m going to miss about not going to Riverside University for college, being able to go over there. When we go to the university, if we take our ID cards, we get to eat at their buffet cafeteria, we get to go to their recreation center. We get to use the library, they are just open. And we get to have fun over there – especially in the library because you know everyone is there for the same purpose, and you just sit there typing, thinking “I’m just as smart as they are!” Just sitting there typing, writing my paper. It is cool. I’m going to miss that.

Briana has strong opinions about the places she frequents and avoids in Riverside. She loves feeling a part of places like the university, the Banks, and Four Towers and likes the peace of city parks and her new neighborhood, Rose Manor. On the other hand, she raises cautionary flags about violence in her old neighborhood, some night clubs and street corners and shares her stress about the emotional hurricane that is the city’s General Hospital.

What is interesting about the way Briana perceives her city as this mix of safe/open/inclusive places and dangerous/closed/exclusive places is that she locates herself as inhabiting a middle ground, somewhere in-between. Speaking both metaphorically and physically, Briana describes Columbus Park, a downtown park frequented by homeless people and drug dealers and considered very volatile and dangerous. Located directly across from the park is the Riverside Performance Hall, a National Historical Landmark and home to the Riverside Symphony Orchestra.

It is kind of weird how you can have something so beautiful and then something so ugly right next to it. A combination so odd you can’t put words to it. If you were to go and take a snapshot of one side of Columbus Park and then another of the side by the Riverside Performance Hall, you wouldn’t know what to think. In a snapshot you might catch a
limo of someone coming to the hall to perform and then on the other side you may catch a homeless man sitting on a bench. I think that’s what makes this city so complex. These two worlds collide all at once, but even though they have collided, they seem to never pay attention to each other… I think I fit in right in the middle now because I’m able to understand both sides...I’ve gotten to see the good times when everything is OK and I’ve gotten to see the worst times when everything is horrible and messed up. I’m walking in the middle which I think is good because I need that balance, especially as I become a young adult. Without it I don’t think I would be as self assured and as confident as I am right now. I know that no matter how good it gets, I can handle it being good. And no matter how bad it gets, I can get it back to being good. I like being in this middle path.

When I asked Briana to describe what it’s like “walking the middle path” she explained, “I feel like I am connected to a lot of people, I can relate to a lot of people. I’ve got friends that live downtown…and I have friends that live in Maryville and go to Riverside Preparatory School” (an upper-class private, suburban school).

For Briana, there is a lot tied up in this complex location of the middle path: her life’s experiences and struggles, her growth and identity, her social networks, and her sense of agency directing her future. Through time and space, she’s identified good and bad places and periods in her life; she sees herself navigating these ups and downs by walking a “balanced” middle path through her actions, friendships and passions.

Briana views much of her world as in conflict. Having experienced the “good times,” and the “beautiful” aspects of life, she draws upon a strong sense of fairness and justice to position herself as a positive force in her community – a “peacemaker,” as Michaels suggested. Briana has demonstrated a willingness to work with and for the oppressed through her choices in her Second Tuesday Project, volunteer work, and her future career. She deliberately chose the topic of foster care abuse for her Second Tuesday Project and quickly secured an appropriate placement where she could develop a
richer understanding of how the state cares for foster children. She is a passionate advocate for finding ways to better serve and protect foster children and their case workers. In addition, for the last two summers, Briana has volunteered to coach little league cheerleading in underserved communities because she felt the kids “needed something positive to do.” And finally, Briana is committed to a career in social work; finding a four-year degree program in social work was a priority in her college search. She feels the career is a perfect fit for her interests and skills.

Though she sees her community in very polar distinctions of good and bad, beautiful and ugly, she tries to navigate its complexity by holding a middle ground. Briana’s sense of walking on “the middle path” through her community and life has defined a clear and confident direction for her future. It is apparent in the way she engages with her friends and community that she will continue to navigate the middle ground as a peacemaker and direct herself forward with a strong sense of justice, fairness, and goodwill.

Adam

Landscapes.

Adam lives with his African-American mom and stepfather in Bridgedale, an older Riverside neighborhood typically associated with poverty, high crime rates, and gang activity. The neighborhood is less than two miles from Jefferson Center and borders the Riverside Zoo and Children’s Hospital. A self-described “Internet addict,” Adam loves to do anything computer related and hopes to pursue a career in information technology. Upon Michaels’ urging, Adam ran for student government his junior year and was elected to a representative position. His only travel outside the state has been
with student government to attend regional meetings and legislative workshops. A bit of
an outsider at school, student government is the only extracurricular activity he attends:
“After school, I basically just go in my house and sit there.” Adam doesn’t have a job but
plans to work after graduation and continue living at home.

In the large class setting, Adam is quiet. Before classes, he places himself at the
margins of the classroom, away from other students. He tends to wander around talking
to his friend Teddy, his teachers, or no one in particular about the weather, the news, or
whatever tidbit of information he most recently discovered online. Michaels describes
Adam and Teddy as the senior class’ “resident geeks,” explaining that,

They talk about things that are really kind of immature for seniors in high
school…they talk about video games and other things in ways that are just
not in a real sophisticated level of conversation and so they seem
immature in relation to their peers. But there is an innocence about them
because they don’t feel funny about it, that is just who they are and they
are comfortable with who they are.

In the smaller group setting of this project’s focus groups, Adam was a loquacious
contributor, opinionated and very willing to share his thoughts about the city of
Riverside, his neighborhood, and the places he visits in the city.

Adam describes his neighborhood of Bridgedale as “your average ghetto, with
police driving around and guys standing on the corners.” A resident there for all of his 19
years, he fondly remembers growing up patronizing locally owned candy and
convenience stores which have long since been abandoned. He feels there has been an
increase in neighborhood violence since he was younger but thinks that crime in
Bridgedale is overstated by the media who “will say anything to get you to watch the
news.” He explains,
People say it’s a ghetto community but I would disagree. I would say it is actually a community where people get along. If you came and lived in Bridgedale, no matter what color you are, people would know you, they would get to know you somehow. If they see you everyday walking up and down the street, they will say, “What’s up? How are things going?” It is really a community where we all get along. There’s some violence but it is not random violence. If you live in Harper Ridge and come to Bridgedale, you don’t want to yell out, “I’m from Harper Ridge!” because that is just asking for trouble. Or, if you come out of nowhere starting trouble, then there’s going to be trouble. I keep telling all my friends, Bridgedale isn’t bad, you have to do something to have something happen to you, it’s not like you are in Chicago or something.

The only place in Bridgedale that Adam feels uncomfortable is the higher income West Bridgedale, a neighborhood with expensive historic homes surrounded by large wooded lots, where the “snooty snoot White people live.” He explains,

The only time I felt nervous was when I was in the rich part of Bridgedale where it is silent, it’s creepy and I just keep thinking some crazy man is going to jump out of the woods. My friend David’s granddaddy lives over there and when you walk up the hill towards his house you walk up this little way with these woods. When I walk by there I always run past because those woods are deep and very, very quiet. There is a sign that says “You are being watched by the neighborhood association” - the neighborhood is full of old people so I doubt they’d do much. But I always think a crazy man or raccoon is going to jump out of those woods.

Adam gets to and from school and all over town via the Riverside bus system. He is most familiar with the 48 and the 52, routes that connect Bridgedale to the rest of the city. He has extensively navigated the city via the transit system in order to visit computer stores, friends’ houses, or area malls. He isn’t fond of shopping and only really goes to malls if they have an arcade or video game store.

It’s not for me, I’m not a clothes man, I’m one of those people who say “It’s not the clothes that make the man, it’s the man who makes the man.” The mall annoys me because there’s not a place for people like me, there are like ten shoe stores…there should be just one. Why would you go to more than one?
Like many of the other students, Adam likes to go to the Banks across the Middlesmith River in the neighboring state. He likes to visit the bookstore there for the wide comic book selection and the video game store to meet other gamers. Adam thinks people are generally friendly at the Banks and he likes that he isn’t bothered by storekeepers or security.

I can go to the bookstore at the Banks and sit down, read a comic book, and have some people come up and say, “What are you reading?” And I’m like, “Ultimate Spiderman,” and they say, “Can I read it after you?”

The only problem Adam sees with the Banks is its location. Though the Banks is only the river’s width distance from downtown Riverside, it is in Plainview, a separate city in the neighboring state. To cross the river requires transferring to Plainview’s bus system, an extra dollar fare each way. Adam’s only alternative is to get off the Riverside bus downtown at Unity Square and walk through town, over the wide bridge that connects the two cities, about a mile walk. Adam explains the problem with the walk is that “I don’t like to walk the bridge because I’m scared of heights and I can only go on warm days. Because walking across that bridge is cold, that air is cold, it is too much.”

Adam’s father works for the city park system and has taken Adam to a number of city parks to practice driving and to show Adam some of the projects (trails, playgrounds, roads) he has worked on. Adam tells stories of driving early in the morning around some of the city parks and being surprised by the number of joggers in some and wildlife in others.

My dad says he saw a coyote eating a rabbit at Mt. Taylor Park. He taught me to drive in that park and a deer came out of nowhere, it stood there in the middle of the road for the longest time. So I honked at it and it ran back into the woods.
When other students lament the trash and disrepair of city parks, Adam is quick to defend their beauty, “Certain parts of the parks are nice at certain times. Eastern Hills Park in the morning way above the river, that looks so nice.” From there, he explained, you could see many of the hills surrounding Riverside. According to Adam’s father, seven of the hills served as early landmarks and became specific neighborhoods as the city grew.

For his Second Tuesday Project, Adam chose to research unemployment services for youth by working at a job center for young people in downtown Riverside. He was motivated by his own difficulties looking for a job but found the center unhelpful.

Basically what they do is that when someone comes in they explain what they do, what they are, then they sit that person down at a computer to sign some applications. That’s it. There are flyers all over the place saying “Now Hiring,” but some of them are outdated and they don’t realize it. There was a Best Buy poster and with three different Best Buys, none of them were hiring.

Michaels agrees that Adam “was bored to tears” at his STP site but explains, “He never really got into the spirit of Second Tuesday, he just did it because he had to do it, it was a day out of school but he never really got into the issue.” Adam explained that he did very little on site, much like the center’s employees, “They just sit there with the flyers at their computers…they only had me put up flyers once and that was the best day I ever had there because I did something.” Still, his experiences and research for the project influenced Adam’s view of Riverside,

The project showed me we are worse off than I thought. A lot of people come in there who are 18 or older, have already graduated and cannot find a job in the city. They are sent around to all these other agencies but still can’t find a job…I also found in my research that in our state we have the highest high school drop out rate in America so jobs that come here leave because there’s no one they can hire.
At school, Adam feels frustrated most of the time because of other students’ behavior. “The teachers never bother me, it’s the students. Sometimes I wish they would behave. I just want to get through the lesson but they don’t stop interrupting. So we have to do the same lesson tomorrow and we do it again and again.” He also describes school as “uncomfortable” due to the physical discomfort he experiences sitting in small desks and chairs all day.

Themes.

Adam’s views of his community, city, and world are strongly shaped by two factors, the economic and geographic logistics of the city bus system and his use of the Internet. Adam navigates the city via the bus system and is acutely aware of its routes, costs, and changes due to construction or urban development. When not out and about, he spends as much time as he can online, visiting his favorite places – gaming animation sites and their associated chat rooms.

Adam believes the Internet has helped expand his knowledge about the world and issues outside of Riverside. He explains that he regularly reads national and international headlines and chats with people from around the world online. Having always lived in the same neighborhood in Riverside, Adam is sure he wants to stay in Riverside the rest of his life but doesn’t see that desire as a reflection of an insular worldview: “I’ve always had a broader view than everybody; I know a lot about what goes on outside of Riverside, I’m not stuck here.” He attributes his knowledge of life outside Riverside to his reading, surfing, and chatting on the Internet.

In regards to the particulars of the city, Adam’s views are strongly shaped by his experiences of the city via the transit system. Adam tends to be critical of city spending,
especially regarding development projects downtown and in Bridgedale. When pressed about specifics, it is clear that much of Adam’s frustration with the city’s decisions stem from how those changes will alter or have altered the transportation system.

I think the city needs to spend its money on better things – like not the zoo. The zoo is supposed to be for animals, I think right now they are building a new entrance to the zoo, I would spend money on affordable housing instead. Where I live near the zoo, they are expanding and I think they are going to block off the street connecting State Street and Mecklen Street so you have to go all the way around just to get to that far side of the zoo, just so it will have more space.

Adam also criticizes downtown development projects because of their negative impact on bus riders. From his perspective, recent development projects near Unity Square – the large transit transfer station – are not beneficial to passengers because the projects inconvenience passengers and compromise their comfort.

In Riverside, we are poor. There are barely any jobs around and the city is trying to get more tourists to come, they tried with casinos but that failed. They rebuilt all of downtown and they rebuilt Central Square and Unity Square, neither of which needed to be rebuilt – especially Unity Square - that money could have gone to something else. I liked the way it was the old way – because the buses came from a shorter direction to get to the Unity Square bus station, now they have to go all the way around because now there’s a curve right there. There used to be a way for the buses to get through on the side but now they have to go all the way around…with the curve there they can’t get through. The way it was before was also better protected from rain and snow. But the new way they built it, the cover goes straight up so if it rains and the rain comes down at an angle, you are going to get rained on, there’s no getting away from the rain. The seats are worse too because there’s no place to sit now.

Not all development projects in Riverside receive Adam’s criticism. A frequent visitor to the Banks, he is excited about the new shops, restaurants, and entertainment district the city of Riverside has planned opposite the Banks. He is excited about this because it will be easier and cheaper to get to,
It’s going to save me a lot of walking time. I don’t have the money to pay for both the buses. Ours is more expensive than theirs. Theirs is a dollar quarter and ours is a dollar fifty. And I won’t have to walk the bridge anymore because I have to walk the bridge to get to the Banks which I don’t like to do because I’m scared of heights.

Spending most of his weekends navigating the city bus system to visit friends and computer or gaming stores throughout Riverside, Adam has a strong sense of the city’s different neighborhoods. When describing “home,” Adam defines it as the entire city of Riverside, “My home is Riverside, all of it.” When asked to describe the city, he talks at length about how confusing it is to figure out the borders of the different “cities within a city,” townships, suburbs, and villages that are located within Riverside. On many occasions he highlighted the fact that often times in Riverside you must, “watch where you are walking because you never know when you are going to leave the city.” His interest in these different communities and their geographic features is enriched by his use of the Internet, and motivated by his use of the bus system. Sharing a story about visiting a park overlook of the city with his father, he explains:

My dad and I used to park right in front of this place where you could see the river, it was so nice in the morning…he called it one of the seven hills of Riverside, do you know the other ones? I know a handful, Oak Manor, Mt. Taylor, East View…I found out right after he told me that there are actually many hills in Riverside…I looked on a website and it said there were not seven but 18 or more and they are not hills but plateaus, they start off as hills but they end up straight and leveled…did you know the city has more than 300,000 people living in it, we are the 45th biggest city in the U.S. behind a few others in our state but we’d be bigger if all those places inside of us didn’t consider themselves their own city. Because Beech Creek has 12,000 people, St. Stevens has 7,000. We are the biggest city in our county. But I’m still confused by what is a suburb of us and what’s a township. I thought some areas, Harborvale, Ashland, I thought they were their own cities; apparently they are another suburb of Riverside. I’m starting to think that anywhere the bus says Zone 2 – which is an extra 50 cents – is a suburb of the city, and anywhere that says Zone 3 is outside the city.
The bus line also shapes Adam’s critique of the city’s unemployment support services because he argues that the few legitimate jobs advertised at his Second Tuesday agency are “not on the bus line.” Again referencing the economics of the public transit system, one of the few things Adam actually commends his youth employment center on is providing clients with a free three month pass on the city buses while they look for employment.

As often as he can, Adam uses the Internet. His love of computers and technology started early, “It started out when I was really little…it started with hooking up games to the TV, hooking up the VCR, fixing the VCR when it broke…” He describes feeling “strong,” “included” and “powerful” online. He loves gaming animation and frequents sites where independent animators share their homemade animations and games online. He checks out new animations, shares his own, and chats with other creators in online forums. In his map of the world, Adam drew himself in the middle in the form of the “fantasy character I use in my animations,” a man wearing a long jacket with a coon-skin cap giving a “thumb’s up” sign. He describes himself and this character as a “happy, positive person” but laments that his peers at school don’t see him that way. In fact, compared to the volatile, argumentative environment he describes at school, Adam believes the Internet is a safe and engaging place where he feels more like himself.

The reason I go on the Internet and talk to people is because they understand me. Not only that, they don’t yell at my opinions, they don’t say “That’s lame, that’s stupid.” If they don’t agree they just say “I don’t agree with that because…” and they bring up facts and I’m like, “I was wrong!” I can’t say that in class because if I say that, someone will say, “That’s right, you were wrong, I was right.”
Adam describes feeling “angry” at school because of his inability to have the sort of conversations he has online in the classroom. He explains,

The forums I got to [online], people are smart. They are not yelling and screaming trying to get their point across. They aren’t all like, “If it’s not our way it’s no way at all and we’re automatically right.” There are some students in this school who just can’t handle an opinion. If they get an opinion different than their own, they say, “No, I have the facts, these are my facts” but their facts are opinions as well! I can’t get anything through.

In many ways, Adam’s geography is sharply restrained by his socioeconomic status. Without any other means of transportation and a limited income, Adam has developed a keen sense of the city’s many small communities because he needs to be aware of changing bus fares for different Riverside townships and suburbs and for crossing the Middlesmith River. His use of the bus has influenced his attitude towards development projects and city spending because of the impact those developments have on his experience as a transit system rider: his exposure to the elements, the inconvenience of longer bus routes, or the reduction of costs to reach his destination.

On the other hand, Adam’s access to the Internet and his ability to freely peruse the World Wide Web have expanded his geography, fostering his “broader view” of the world. It has also enabled him to find safe places online where his opinions and sense of self are respected. The Internet has helped Adam identify a potential career path and find social circles where he feels a sense of camaraderie and belonging. Interestingly, Adam’s ability to use the web to free himself from the insular and disapproving social atmosphere he encounters at school paired with his familiarity with the landscape and community mosaic of Riverside have fostered his very confident, contented view of his neighborhood, community and city. He feels strongly connected to the geography and
civic communities of Riverside and finds himself comfortably at home throughout the city’s neighborhoods.

Cross-Case Analysis
Case studies of Kayla-Jean, Dana, Briana and Adam demonstrate the diversity of perspectives even from students’ at the same school. Their geographies highlight issues of identity, safety, cultural diversity and economics, reflecting young people’s diversity of experiences and perspectives on life in the city. Still, there are some issues and themes from participants’ geographies which overlap; when studied collectively, the students’ geographies support interesting themes, trends, and contexts regarding young people’s collective experiences and perceptions of life in Riverside. In this section, I will examine how issues of race, class, gender and politics contribute to participants’ geographies of home, neighborhood, school, and the city. I will also look at recreational, occupational, educational and transportation settings beyond home and school that students cited as significant, meaningful, or problematic. In addition, I will explore the construction of ecological places in students’ geographies and my analytical struggle to identify and describe them. I will draw upon Kayla-Jean, Dana, Briana and Adam’s case studies as well as data from other participating students’ case studies, interviews, and focus group sessions to highlight themes and trends important to students’ experiences in Riverside. Throughout this section, I will situate findings in relevant literature from Children’s Geographies, education, and social studies of childhood.

Although adolescents’ spatial behaviors vary widely (Wyllie & Smith, 1996, p. 254) their comparison presents opportunities to look for similarities and differences that
help us understand more about the social, cultural, ecological, economic and political contexts that frame their experiences. For educators, this meaningful work reminds us of the complexity of young people’s lives and offers pathways for creating relevant and important curriculum that speaks to, engages and challenges students’ prior knowledge and understandings about their place in the world. I will conclude this chapter by examining implications of these findings for educators.

*Home*

Participants typically drew their homes in the center of their maps (see Appendix B) and introduced it saying something like, “This is my happy home,” or “I love my home.” Descriptions of home were generally positive, reflecting a sense of security, support, and belonging. Students used terms like: “strong,” “confident,” “relaxed,” “calm,” “happy,” and “safe” to define home. They explained: “Home is a place where you can be completely yourself, you are free to be yourself.” “Home is a place where you feel safe and loved. Where you run to when you feel like there’s no place to run.” “It’s where memories have been made and will be made.”

These descriptions of the emotional landscape of home were often paired with descriptions of the physical and material characteristics of home. Dana described spending all summer as a young teen watching TV in the basement of her new home after her family moved to Rose Manor. She remembered feeling sad that she didn’t have any friends nearby but happy to be comfortable, cool and entertained in the basement with its big-screen TV. Adam lamented in detail his home’s inadequate technological resources, starting with problem-prone VCRs, to an old Apple computer, followed by a series of more modern - though second-hand and slow - computers.
Students’ depictions of home as both a physical and emotional place resonate with research that highlights home’s emotional significance, concrete materiality, and relevance to identity formation (Chow & Healey, 2008; White, 2002). Blunt and Dowling (2006) explain that,

“Home is both a place or physical location and a set of feelings...home is a relation between material and imaginative realms and processes, whereby physical location and materiality, feelings and ideas, are bound together and influence each other, rather than separate and distinct (2006, p. 254).

Blunt and Dowling highlight the importance of politics in the home, emphasizing “the nexus between home, power and identity” (2006, p. 22). They describe the importance of a home’s social dynamics in shaping one’s experiences and perspectives of home. For participants in this study, the role of social relationships and politics in the home was important. For Candace, relationships made home her favorite place to be: “The happiest place for me is my home, I love being at home because it’s like - I don’t know the adjective here - everybody is close or whatever.” But for Briana, the limited space available in her house made relationships more complex. She explained that although her house was small, “I drew it kind of big because I have a lot of brothers and sisters and even though it is only my brother and me that live there, all my other brothers and sisters come over there and start getting on my nerves all the time.” As high school seniors, parental expectations for students’ living situations in coming years added a sometimes stressful component to the concept of home. Kayla-Jean described feeling frustrated at home because she was so “restricted” by her parents’ rules. She explains though, how it was important to her to finish her senior year on good terms with them and not disturb the sense of peace in her “happy, happy home”:
I don't get to do that [go out to clubs] though because I'm so restricted… my friends are always going here or going there, they talk about going to the clubs and I know that is out of the question because my parents. Until I actually graduate and move out and am on my own… but I’m not anxious for that moment - I used to be anxious but now I want everything to just go easy and smooth without any hostility between me and my parents.

Adam planned on living at home after high school and attending community college but explained that his relationship with his mother would change: “I’m going to follow her rules still but I’m going to go out more. I barely go out now because my mama’s against it.” Valentine (2004) finds these sorts of struggles are common between adults and youth in the home:

Home, in particular, is a space that is constituted through a complex range of familial rules and regulations and, as such, boundary disputes with parents are commonplace. In particular... domestic tensions around home rules and the use of different rooms within the family home represent a conflict between adults' desire to establish order, regularity and strong domestic boundaries, and young people's preferences for disorder and weak boundaries (2004, p. 83).

Home can also be more than one’s immediate living space. Blunt and Dowling (2006) define home as “multiscalar” (p. 22) including the association of “home” with one’s community, city, state, and nation. In this study, teens also used the term “home” to reference their relationship to the city of Riverside. When Kayla-Jean argued she was ready to “leave home” she was talking about the city:

Alright I'm ready to go - for real, I feel like I'm ready to get out of Riverside because you know - a new environment - anybody would say the same thing about the place they've been living in for years on end it's time for me to leave… it’s not fresh to me anymore - its all worn out like a pair of jeans, just throw them away.

Disagreeing, Dana explained that she would return to Riverside frequently while away at college and would make it her home as an adult, “I want to stay in Riverside, I want to
visit the world but this is where my family is – I can’t take myself away from Riverside.”

Adam, too, was sure he would stay, “My home is Riverside, all of it.”

But this broader sense of home as the city was disrupted by some students’ negative perceptions of economic opportunity and safety in Riverside. Briana explained,

I don’t think that I will [stay in Riverside]. I don’t, because I feel like there’s not that much opportunity here, I know they are all saying that the violence is going down in Riverside but I don’t see that, there’s still people being shot every night, people getting robbed - I feel like if we are going to pay all this money for my education and then I come back here and have something bad happen because I’m in a bad city, it would be useless. Four years, all wasted. I just don’t want to do that – I probably won’t come back.

Cristina agreed and liked to imagine her future home somewhere in California. She felt she could get a better job there and described California as a “state of opportunity.”

Students’ notions of home varied. Some felt a strong connection with Riverside and claimed it as “home” – others remained connected only to the people they shared a house with. For all participants, the changing dynamics of family social relationships as students’ approached graduation meant their definition of and relationship to home was also shifting. During their 5-month study of young people’s transitions to university, Chow and Healey (2008) found that participants’ sense of place and place-identity changed through their transition, though not uniformly. They explain, “One particularly interesting facet was that all participants expressed different feelings towards their home following the transition, asserting less dependence on it and realizing that the notion of home (and significance of a place) is itself open to interpretation” (Chow & Healey, 2008, p. 371). This was certainly true of students in this study, whose ideas of home, like their lives and geographies, were in transition.
School

Participants spent at least six hours a day at Jefferson Center; it was an important component of their geographies. Analysis of participants’ school geographies indicate alarming trends; their perceptions of school facilities, school climate, and relationships with peers and teachers suggest oppressive ideologies about race and class are at work in the school system.

School facilities.

Students described Jefferson Center’s large, historic, ornate central building as “creepy,” “old,” and “like a prison.” Kayla-Jean drew barbed wire around Jefferson Center in her map, “down here is this place I dread, see the barbed wire around that school!” Not to be taken lightly, Fine, Burns, Payne and Torre (2004) argue that these sorts of perceptions indicate that school has become a complex symbol of economic, racial and social inequities for students. Fine et. al. (2004) explain that when students associate their schools with prisons, “They realize, painfully, that they are being redlined out of the public sphere of public education, and corralled, instead, within the long, stretchy net of the other better funded public sphere: the criminal justice system” (2004, p. 2204). Ginwright, Cammarota and Noguera (2005) also look critically at the connection between schooling and the criminal justice system, suggesting the association impacts young people’s current and future roles as community members. Associating schooling with the prison industrial complex demonstrates the marginalization of young people and the spatial control and containment they experience through the public institution of education.

Students were also frustrated with the physical conditions of Jefferson Center. Adam disliked the uncomfortable desks students were required to sit in all day; other
students remarked upon their old and outdated computers, cardboard covered and boarded up windows, and the ancient and “scary elevator.” Candace pointed out the inequities of school funding she observed when visiting other schools for athletic competitions:

    When I go to other schools like Lakeview, I want to know why they get all that stuff and this is all we get! It makes me mad because they have all that new technology and I was looking at one classroom and every desk had a computer at the desk and they weren’t bootleg computers like the ones we have here – they were high tec stuff and they get new books and their sports, their uniforms are better. They have more choices of what they want to do after school, and all we have is the basics.

What Candace did not say about this comparison - but what I and the other students familiar with Riverside schools understood was that Lakeview is a middle-upper class, suburban, all-White high school. Candace was highlighting more than simple inequities in school funding, she was talking about inequities based on race, class and culture.

    Durán-Naruki (2008) suggests that students’ perceptions of poor school conditions impact academic outcomes and that poor conditions are intrinsically related to social justice issues. She explains, “Public school buildings embody the interest and investment that a community has in education and in the future of their children” (2008, p. 285). She argues that by letting schools deteriorate, they reproduce a marginalizing discourse about the faith and investment the community has in its young people – most often it is the poor, urban and minority students attending the most run-down schools. Indeed, although some students described feeling “included” and “confident” at Jefferson Center, the majority of emotions associated with school were “angry,” “uncomfortable,” “weak,” and “frustrated.”
Though Jefferson Center was scheduled for a significant remodel of its older buildings in upcoming years, it is clear that these students did not reap the benefits of the renovations and instead encountered frustration and inequality when it came to their school facilities. All participants were anxious to be finished with high school at Jefferson Center and agreed with Candace who explained “I’m very happy this is my last year, I will not be looking back when I leave.”

*School climate and social relationships.*

When asked why she had generally such negative feelings about school, Dana explained, “It’s the people in the building!” Across the board, students agreed that relationships with teachers and peers in school mattered a great deal. They disagreed as to whether those relationships at Jefferson Center were generally positive or negative. Charity was frustrated because she felt that “Students at other schools get more support too, here a lot of teachers, it seems like they really don’t care.” Adam felt differently, “The teachers never bother me, it’s the students, sometimes I wish they would behave. I just want to get through the lesson but they don’t stop [disrupting class]. So we have to do the same lesson tomorrow and do it again and again…” Dana was also frustrated that poorly behaved students were able to disrupt the flow of classes and divert curricular plans, “When you are trying to learn in class and someone is acting up the teachers only say, “Just be quiet, just be quiet.” And I’m thinking, “No! Send them out of the classroom!” That makes me so mad.”

Adam praised teachers like Michaels who didn’t treat students “like children,” but Adam was frustrated by his peers who “didn’t get” Michaels’ jokes about race and class that were meant to make students think critically about stereotypes.
I don’t think all teachers treat you like children in school, like Mr. Michaels, he can talk to you about anything – it’s when other students take offense to what he says that it annoys me. Like he’s not being racist, he’s just playing and you know it. And other students say things about White people and say, “I didn’t mean it I’m just playing,” but if Michaels says it, they’re like, “he’s racist!”

Researchers concur that the relationships within the school strongly shape the school’s climate. Booth and Sheehan (2008) argue that teacher support is critical to maintaining a positive school environment but that peer relationships are far more influential in directing students’ perception of school climate. Swaminathan (2004) highlights the importance of social bonding for young people and suggests that “The need to belong to a peer group or to have a relationship with an adult at school is strong in students” (2004, p. 34). In their study of critical sites for adolescent socialization, Arnon, Shamai, and Ilatov (2008) found that school mattered a great deal and that “Teenagers expressed complex attitudes toward school. They distinguished between school as a formal institution and their teachers as its significant members” (2008, p. 390). In addition, Arnon, et. al. argue that students’ most common perception of the school institution was negative. This point resonates with Adam’s frustration with school as an authoritative institution ripe with uncomfortable desks and poor materials but distinct from teachers like Michaels whom he respects and values.

Race, economics, and social relationships were all implicated in students’ school geographies. Participants made it clear that relationships with peers and faculty strongly shaped the school climate and were the most significant influences on their experiences within Jefferson Center’s old, brick walls.
Neighborhoods

Jefferson Center’s students come from all over the city, as did the small sample of participants in this study. Of the eight students involved, they represented seven different neighborhoods. Although most of the seven neighborhoods were predominantly lower-middle income and African-American, some had much worse reputations than others. Students described feeling a range of emotions in their neighborhoods: “peaceful,” “comfortable,” “excluded,” and “intimidated.” When discussing their neighborhoods in focus group sessions and interviews, the most prominent themes students brought up were safety, identity, and politics.

Instead of drawing upon city-generated census and crime data to validate and compare students’ generalizations of safety and diversity, I will focus on students’ perceptions of Riverside neighborhoods. In this approach, I am in agreement with other geographers who argue that young people’s *perception* of a neighborhood is more relevant to understanding their geographies than external data (Fagg, Curtis, Clark, Congdon, & Stansfeld, 2008; Kowaleski-Jones & Dunifon, 2006; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2007).

**Neighborhood safety.**

Adam was the only male in the study and his descriptions of neighborhood safety differed significantly than the females. Adam lives in Bridgedale, considered a very dangerous neighborhood by all the students, but his description of it was much different than Valerie’s, who lives there as well. Adam:

You know people say it’s a ghetto community but I would disagree - I would say it’s actually a community where people get along. If you came and lived in Bridgedale, no matter what color you are, people would know you, they would get to know you somehow. If they see you everyday walking up and down the street, they will say “What’s up, how are things
going?” It’s really a community where we all get along. There’s some violence but its not random violence. If you live in Harper Ridge and come to Bridgedale, do not yell, “I’m from Harper Ridge!” That’s asking for trouble. Or if you come out of nowhere starting trouble, then there’s going to be trouble. I keep telling all my friends, Bridgedale isn’t bad, you have to do something to have something happen to you - its not like you are in Chicago.

This was one of the few times Adam discussed safety in his neighborhood or anywhere else in the city. For many of the young women, this was not the case at all. Valerie describes Bridgedale this way:

Whenever I think of the gas stations in my neighborhood, they need undercover security. The gas station by where I live, they've been robbed like three times, but they still stay open because that's their main money making… but it’s just ridiculous to think that people are getting away with this… I live in Bridgedale and it's considered a bad neighborhood - that's why I'm about to get out of it - but I feel safe on my street - but there are areas I don't go to - because if it’s not about girls being ignorant it’s about having to worry about a gun shot coming out of somewhere and then I have my nieces I have to worry about and take care of. If I go somewhere, my mama asks me to take them with me and I don't want to go somewhere with them where there's about to be a fight or something. I remember one day I took them to the park and I remember I hadn't taken them anywhere for like half of the summer and I took them and the first time, they were having fun for a good 30 minutes, but then these boys were talking on the basketball court about having guns and a fight about to start and I took the girls away and they were all sad because they were having fun and they had to leave. But they didn't realize that we had to leave because people were talking about shooting.

This was not the only time Valerie mentioned safety and crime. When Valerie mapped her world, she included in her drawing and spent a lot of time discussing her sister’s apartment, emphasizing its security: “She lives in this nice complex, its got security…she has to beep you in, then you go in and you have to get signed in by security.”

Every young woman in the study at some point or another discussed their experiences and perceptions of safety and violence in the city. These findings resonate with many studies of safety and gender showing that women experience and access space.
much differently than do men and that females change the way they move through public space differently based on a fear of victimization (De Groof, 2008; Domosh & Seager, 2001; Dunkley, 2004; McDowell, 1999b). Women in these studies, and the young women I worked with, often described places in terms of their relative safety or danger, and in practice avoided areas because of a fear for personal safety. When they had to, women tried to enter certain dangerous spaces (street corners, neighborhoods) during daylight, with friends, or in the safety of vehicles (buses, cars). Gender and fear of victimization were also clearly influential components of students’ geographies.

Briana was keenly interested in and aware of neighborhood safety. She highlighted neighborhoods and locales throughout the city that she avoided because of violent incidents or reputations. When describing her neighborhood, Lincoln Heights, she explained,

When I was little, I thought the kids were thugs, the streets were dirty, the police were everywhere. There was always guys on the bridge selling drugs - always. Once I got older, it seemed like it got better for a minute - but then my friend got shot - he was over at somebody’s house spending the night and then somebody walked in and just shot him in the head - he was set up by his friends. And these are the people I grew up playing jump rope and hopscotch and racing bikes with and I decided I didn’t really want to be up there.

Briana told stories about neighborhoods where cousins and friends were shot and others about her own neighborhood, Lincoln Heights, where her brother got in trouble running errands for drug dealers. She lamented the fact that because of the violence throughout the city, teens were restricted in what they were able to do,

We just need more opportunities - everything that is good here always turns up bad somehow. We can't go to the basketball games downtown because they are fighting, we can't go to the football games because they are shooting at the football games - high school football games!
Participants’ ideas about their neighborhoods come from a variety of sources. Elwood (2004) describes these ideas as “abstract spatial narratives” and explains that “…abstract spatial narratives tend to have been constructed from film, television, and news media resources, as well as from family narratives, and the students tend to be able to identify the sources of their knowledge quite clearly” (2004, p. 58). Pain (2001) shows that spatial narratives from parents, peers, or media provide information for young people about what places and people are safe or dangerous. She explains that the narratives also shape the places young people have access to and the behaviors they enact in those places. In this study, it was clear that many of the participants’ spatial narratives were constructed by first hand experience: Kayla-Jean described the tension present when she and her father had to pick up her brother from Bridgedale after he had been threatened at gun point by other youth. Briana had multiple stories of friends who were shot and killed by peers and a cousin who was shot and hospitalized. Valerie had been chased out of city parks because of the threat of violence, and even Adam had stories of being kicked out of city malls because of fighting. In a separate study, Pain (2005) explains that lower-income youth experience danger and crime differently than more affluent youth; it was clear in this study that participants’ had many first-hand experiences with crime and violence in their neighborhoods.

An important influence on adolescents’ spatial narratives of safety comes from their parents’ parenting styles (De Groof, 2008) and parents’ perceptions of safety and violence in the neighborhood (Pain, 2006; Rankin & Quane, 2002). Kayla-Jean described her parents creating a “restricted” life for her based on their fears of her victimization in the neighborhood and beyond. Valerie remembered how as a child, her
mother would allow her to walk by herself to a friend’s house on the other side of
Bridgedale but how that would never be the case today.

Participants in this study also described Riverside neighborhoods as strongly
segregated based on race and class. Certain neighborhoods were discussed often if
perceived to be especially homogenous, demonstrative of the city’s segregation. Kayla-
Jean described the upscale neighborhood of Eastside as “where all the White people live”
and Candace also mentioned it when describing segregation in the city:

All you gotta do is just ride down the street, for example, Center Avenue
in Eastside. All you have to do is ride down it and you can see a
difference - the street connects Eastside to Bridgedale and you can tell
when Bridgedale starts and Eastside stops because its like here's the green
grass and you can just tell.

Adam was careful to advise Dana that when she settles as an adult in Riverside, she
should avoid West Bridgedale (a historic, wealthy neighborhood) because that’s where
“all the snooty-snoot White people live.”

To some extent, students in this study demonstrate similarities to the students in
Wridt’s (2004) study who closely identify with their neighborhood “block” in New York
City and associate racial, cultural, and economic identities with specific blocks or
neighborhoods. In her research, “Young people formed groups based primarily on
gendered or racialized norms and values indicative of a particular block and larger social
expectations” (2004, p. 215). Young people in this study view neighborhoods like
Bridgedale or Harper Ridge as “tough” and “dangerous” and neighborhoods like
Southwood as less sophisticated, poor, and trashy. In some instances, students seemed to
brag about the “ghetto-ness” of their neighborhood. In the following exchange, Adam
and Valerie shared - with a great deal of bravado - how tough their neighborhood of Bridgedale has become:

Adam – I used to not hear so much shooting, now you hear shooting…

Valerie and Adam together – Every night!

Adam – Especially where I live on 8th Street, I hear it all the time.

Valerie – It never fails…

Adam – There were all these stores that used to be there, there were two candy stores…

Valerie – Ice cream stores…

Adam – Do you remember Mr. Martin’s and the Sweet Shop? J&Z’s BBQ?

Valerie – …all that’s abandoned…

On the other hand, Dana and Candace’s neighborhoods of Rose Manor and Winslow - both more integrated and middle class than Bridgedale - are viewed as “quiet, calm” and somewhat boring. Rarely did Dana or Candace speak up about their neighborhoods during focus group sessions. The only time they discussed their neighborhoods was during individual interviews. It seemed that due to their safe and mundane nature, they did not merit much group discussion.

*Neighborhood identities and politics.*

Like Wridt’s (2004) young participants, the young people in this study utilized neighborhood stereotypes and narratives to “spatially differentiate themselves from one another using ‘the block’ as a group signifier” (p. 217). Sometimes associating neighborhood characteristics with each other’s identities was used to tease. In the following exchange, Briana discussed the relationships between neighborhood trash and
crime; in a joke that Kayla-Jean was in on, Briana suggested that Kayla-Jean’s neighborhood of Southwood was full of litter and crime:

Briana - When you think about it, most neighborhoods that you drive down and there is trash on the ground, bad things happen in those neighborhoods. Bridgedale, you go up Main Street and you will see trash on the ground – next to a garbage can. Go downtown, you see trash everywhere. I don't even want to put down some other neighborhoods because there are people at this table who might get offended, so we're not going to talk about that neighborhood…

Kayla-Jean and Briana together, laughing - …Southwood!

Even at the outset of this study, participants were well aware of each other’s neighborhoods. The issue of what neighborhood students came from had long ago been established. Unlike Wridt’s subjects though, my students were careful to differentiate their personal identities from their neighborhood’s cultural, racial, and economic stereotypes. Valerie explained that she had strong aspirations for success and was going to “get out of” Bridgedale. Charity also positioned herself as different:

You know how everyone is saying they want a "ghetto dude" I'm not like that. I want somebody who's into school, has a head on their shoulders, has a future ahead of them. And they think something's wrong with me because I don't like going to all those loud parties and I don't like the atmosphere. I feel that's how people in our class have been. I've been out of the country you know and I can't sit down and talk to somebody about it in the classroom because ain't nobody into that stuff, ain't nobody trying to get into that type of mindset. I can't sit up here and have that type of conversation with somebody because they are talking about something way different than I am. Even though I have grown up in the same type of neighborhood they have, I feel like I have a totally different personality.

Fagg, Curtis, Clark, Congdon and Stansfeld (2008) explore young people’s sense of alienation or attachment to their neighborhoods in association with “independently assessed area conditions” like youth centers, sports facilities, public transport, relative safety, and tidiness (2008, p. 140). The researchers surveyed young people to measure neighborhood perceptions based on whether youth like their area, feel part of their area,
feel safe there, like others in their area, and if other people like their area. They define alienation as a lack of attachment “that may arise when one’s residential area is unattractive or socially stressful.” (2008, p. 130). Fagg et. al. found that who you were mattered more than where you were in terms of a sense of community attachment, "Neighborhood perceptions were strongly associated with certain characteristics of the adolescents themselves, as well as with independently assessed area conditions. Relevant individual variables were: ethnic group; special educational needs; family harmony; social support and income security within the family" (2008, p. 140).

Fagg et.al’s (2008) emphasis on individual identity and family influence seems to resonate with participants’ narratives of neighborhood safety, tidiness, and sense of similarity (or dissimilarity) with their neighborhood peers. But, students in this study seemed to formulate neighborhood geographies based more on personal experience and peer perceptions than on amenities like youth centers and places to hang out. Students were most interested in describing neighborhoods in terms of race, diversity, and difference. Other issues (like youth centers, sports facilities, places to hang out, transportation) were important in regards to how students felt about the city as a whole. Possibly because these students attended school outside their neighborhood and were familiar with other areas of the city, they often discussed issues of attachment and alienation in terms of the city of Riverside, not their individual neighborhoods. If there was any sense of alienation, it was about Riverside as a city, not their particular neighborhood.

Missing from Fagg et. al.’s (2008) discussion was an emphasis on the role of politics in young people’s sense of alienation and attachment to their neighborhood, or in
the case of most of my participants, their city. As students in this study were on the cusp of graduating from high school and possibly gaining more personal freedom and autonomy, they were increasingly aware of political dynamics related to their neighborhoods. When discussing the qualities of her very low-income, predominantly African-American neighborhood close to downtown, Cristina explained,

I know people but am not close to them all mostly because of the drug thing or they are into other stuff that I'm not into so I kind of stay to myself. If I see them I might speak to them or something but...the last couple days we've heard people getting shot, and that's crazy because I don't remember it being like that last year that much, so already its just April and its starting off like that so this summer its going to be real crazy...I can't say I really like the place, because it could be worse. But if I had to chose what neighborhood I could live in, I wouldn't choose it [downtown] for myself. But I had no choice, it’s where my mom has lived all her life and my grandma too. So it’s kind of like, this is where you have to be right now.

Cristina can see that her neighborhood is not a positive environment for her but also realizes that she has no power to change the situation because of her mother’s and her grandmother’s choice to live there. Students in this study were well aware of the limits to their own and their parents’ power when it comes to decisions about where to live and how one’s community functions. In the exchange below, students explore a myriad of topics related to multiple scales of politics including city funding, gentrification, race, class, and economics. Note the distinction made between citizens; “us” is used to reference poor, working-class, African-American citizens and “them” is used to reference rich, White people in power. A sense of alienation and marginalization from city decision-making is apparent through the adolescents’ use of this language.

Briana - It seems like they [“the city”] are spending all the money - and I don't mean to be racist or anything - but it seems like they spend money on things that aren't going to affect African-Americans or people in the city. Like the zoo - I don't know a lot of poor people that go to the zoo...
Adam- I don't want to sound like my aunt or anything who says like "the White people are chasing us out"

Kayla-Jean - But they are!

Adam- Not the White people, but the rich people

Kayla-Jean - The government - I think they are trying to make Riverside seem like something that it isn't - I think they are doing the wrong way.

Valerie – It’s like they are chasing all the inner-city people out.

Briana - Out of nowhere they put all these new pretty buildings downtown and then they price them so high, most of the people down there can't afford to live there anymore.

Kayla-Jean - I remember when I was little downtown there was all these shops down on First Street, a whole strip of nothing but stores - and then when the riot came around all those stores closed down, they [city government] were like "Well these people [African-Americans in Riverside] don't appreciate these Black-owned businesses" so they started building up those condos down there. You look at it like, dang, they are trying to get their city back.

Valerie - And it isn't right, it don't look right because you have all these beautiful condos and then right across the street you have these run down, abandoned buildings, yards that are still trashy.

As Wridt (2004) explains, “…block politics is symptomatic of larger social processes of exclusion/inclusion based upon a young person’s social, economic, sexual and racial marginalization.” (2004, p. 217). Students in this study were not immune or unfamiliar with these processes. Charity highlighted the city’s economic disparity, “Riverside is a pretty boring place it’s very dirty – and poverty is all around you. The only nice places are in the suburbs which have huge beautiful houses and great scenery.” Sadly, these observations left students with a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. Frustrated with the city’s racially and economically segregated neighborhoods, Candace came to the
conclusion that “It seems like there will be more opportunity somewhere else. I don't think there's much opportunity here.”

Students’ neighborhood geographies were rich with complex racial, gender, cultural, economic and political influences. Interested in issues of safety, diversity, equality, and power, they drew upon personal experiences, parental advice, peer narratives, and media to formulate spatial narratives of their own and other neighborhoods. Although they made some connections between personal identities and the “racialized norms and values” (Wridt, 2004, p. 215) of their neighborhood cultures, students were quick to differentiate themselves from negative neighborhood stereotypes asserting their desire to achieve, succeed, and “get out of the ‘hood.” Confident in their own abilities, they were still aware of the challenges broader social and political processes posed to their potential for establishing safe, affordable, and prosperous lives in the city.

The City

All but one participating student had lived their entire life in Riverside and most had fond memories of their early childhood growing up in the city. Possibly because of the emotional significance of their final year in high school and the impending transitions after graduation, participants enjoyed reminiscing about their childhood during focus group sessions. Students described neighborhood candy stores, rollerskating rinks, and playing at some of the larger city parks when they were young. Briana remembered enjoying school field trips; she spoke about visiting Henry Thomas’ house down river from Riverside – an important stop on the Underground Railroad. Thomas was born a slave, bought his freedom, and later became a successful inventor and owner of a large
foundry; travelers on the Underground Railroad would cross the Middlesmith river upon Thomas’s signal and climb the “Freedom Stairs” up from the river banks to his house. Briana explained,

You know what is beautiful about our city, the historical houses. They are beautiful - and the trails through the city. The trails up to Henry Thomas’ house through the woods - and all the stairs… it was crazy steep I lost like 10 pounds going up there - it was pretty though.

The historical significance of Riverside as the gateway to freedom for slaves heading north was not lost in the young people’s geographies. But it wasn’t always a positive association. When Candace was asked how she describes Riverside to outsiders, she exclaimed, “Crappy. I don't like Riverside. I just don't like it. It's so… segregated… you would think we are up in the north but technically Riverside is in the south.”

Race was an important factor mediating students’ experiences in the city. In particular, they cited the need for more spaces for youth, especially Black youth, like youth centers and teen clubs that were accessible by the city bus system. Briana talked about the need for more places like Basicz, a hip-hop arts-focused youth center in downtown. Kayla-Jean spoke proudly of the Riverside Black Theater Company for its ability to create spaces to celebrate Black Arts in the community but lamented its limited visibility to African-American youth. Researchers have long echoed students’ sentiments, arguing for the creation of safe spaces, free spaces, and “home places” for youth, especially African-American youth, in the city (Bettis & Adams, 2005; hooks, 1991).

Ross (2006) explains how broad macro-level economic, social, and racial ideologies often influence the availability of free spaces for urban youth. In her case study of the contested beginnings of an urban youth center, the TAC, she explains,
Racism, agism, and classism were powerful forces that shaped much of the dialogue about TAC’s members. Politicians, business owners, police, and groups of citizens (all White and primarily middle class) used images of gangs, drugs, violence, and delinquency to justify why young people of color should not be visible in the downtown. They couched their fears and prejudices in talk about the incompatibility of youth development and economic development. They used their relative position of power to argue that TAC members would bring the wrong type of diversity to downtown Unionville (2006, p. 299).

For students in my study, these same forces of racism, agism, and classism are certainly at play in Riverside. Though their experiences were not as overtly contested as the young TAC members and their community’s urban planners, students in my study were also subject to the interplay of space, power, politics, race, age and consumption.

The city’s malls and spatial control.
Students cited repeatedly that the most popular place for them to hang out were the city’s malls. These findings resonate with other research which suggests malls are important spaces for youth and may provide a safe escape from low-income neighborhoods (Chin, 2001; Thomas, 2005; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2000). But even hanging out at the mall was problematic for this study’s participants; upon first mention of malls as a recreation site, Dana hinted at her discomfort:

I love to shop but I’m uncomfortable at the mall – I just feel like I don’t belong at the mall, I feel like everybody is staring at me…I love going to the mall because I love to shop, I just like going around, but its like – ugh, so many people! I like to be with me and my friends when it’s kind of empty in the mall.

Charity offered, “I hate it when there’s a lot of loud people at the mall acting wild… I don’t know what they are doing acting out at the mall and being disrespectful.” She described a mall in her hometown of Lake City that enacted a curfew for teens because of some young patrons’ behaviors. Dana responded with frustration, “Yeah, because when
you see a whole bunch of teenagers acting out, I don’t like it, I don’t like how my
generation acts and I’m ashamed to be associated with them.” Candace added,

People already have their perception of how Black teens are and it is that
we are loud and we don’t know how to act and that’s not me. I know how
to act, my mama raised me right. They make everyone else look bad.
And they are always like, “Why is that cop hanging around?” And it’s
like, “Because you are being loud!”

Students were frustrated with the presence of police in the malls and surveillance
by mall security or employees; students attributed this close monitoring to negative
stereotypes about Black teens. Adult control and supervision of youth spaces is nothing
new (Aitken, 2001; Massey, 1998). What is significant here is the fact that young people
argue they are subject to spatial control based primarily on race. Candace tells a story
about enforcement of a teen curfew to illustrate:

There was this one instance where me and my friends were kicked out [of
a mall]. We were just walking around at night time and we got kicked out
– and then we saw these two little White girls and they were louder than
us and the security guard said to us “Are you girls underage? You have to
leave.” And then we were leaving and we saw [the White girls] and I
looked at the security guard thinking “are you going to tell them?” And it
was clear that they were younger than us, they were like 12 years old or
something, and he just went on walking.

Thomas (2005) warns that racially targeted spatial control by police and store
employees like surveillance and restricting access contribute to minority youth’s negative
sense of race and class identity. She cites the story of Tyquasia, an African-American
teen who is part of a peer group that becomes “priced out” of hanging at bowling alleys
when charged for entrance. When she and her friends start hanging out in parking lots
and city parks, they are consequently chased out by police. Thomas explains,

The very practice of hanging out was an instruction on the qualities of
‘Black’, and what it came to mean in public urban space to Tyquasia. This
lesson involved an oppositional stance vis-à-vis the city’s police.
Tyquasia recognized that the group of Black kids is threatening to the social-spatial order of the city, not because the kids engaged in violent or outright civically resistant activities, but because they are Black. According to Tyquasia, the dominant meaning of the timespace and the ideas of youth that adults hold and enforce are mutually defined. This spatial subjectivity instructs Tyquasia on the consequences of ‘Black’ and her own development and articulation of a racialized identity...Thus, the constant profit impetus of business provoked Tyquasia’s interaction with police, and her racialized identity in part stems from the consequent confrontation with police that she interpreted as racist. In other words, this process constitutes Tyquasia’s racialized identity (2005, p. 600).

Similar to Tyquasia’s experience, economics, politics and race also played into my students’ experiences of youth space in the city. Their ability or inability to go to clubs because of a lack of transportation (most teen clubs are located in the suburbs, off the city bus line), their frustration with access to certain malls, and their discomfort with security surveillance when shopping shaped their sense of how others viewed them as Black teens. Unlike Tyquasia though, participants in this study were quick to distinguish themselves and their racial identity from the stereotypical characteristics police and authority figures impressed upon them. Candace condemned rowdy and obnoxious behavior, differentiating her own behavior by explaining that she was “raised right” and knew “how to act.” When talking about the bad behavior that resulted in the exclusion of teens from a local mall, Charity explained, “they [the rowdy teens] make us look bad because I’m not that type of person – I don’t think anyone here is.”

Though students were aware of negative stereotypes of Black teens, they demonstrated a great deal of resilience, asserting and claiming positive aspects of their African-American identity. Kayla-Jean spoke often about the pride she developed for her community learning about African-American art and cultural heritage through her work and research related to the Riverside Black Theater Company. Candace, excited about
her future at a large state university demonstrated a great deal of understanding and resilience in her outlook, suggesting that negative stereotypes would not hold her back,

It’s sad that people judge from the minority, but when you do have people out there act like that and then you see someone else you assume the worst. But you see bad things about Black people on the TV and you assume they are all like that, and we have to pay for that. But I’m not worried about all that.

When talking about negative stereotypes and his ability to brush them off, Adam asserted, “It’s not the clothes that make the man, it’s the man that makes the man.” And Dana shared a story about the need to celebrate who you are culturally, and emphasized how sharing that knowledge, especially with White people, was a way of “lifting them up.”

People need to embrace their color too, I’m like dang, just deal with it – I’m Black. Like my friend Rachel [she’s White], she doesn’t know what “finna” means. She didn’t know what “finna” was and I was like “I’m finna do it” and she looked at me like, “What?” and I’m like “I’m finna!” she’s like, “What’s finna?” I’m like, “about too.” She’s like, “I’m sorry Dana, I am so White it is amazing.” I’m like, “it’s allright, we gonna lift you up this year.”

_Inclusive spaces in the city and beyond._
Young people in this study were not plagued by racist and classist control everywhere; they cited many places and smaller communities where racial acceptance and equality were central. In these places, both educational and public, students described diverse groups of teens getting along peacefully and integrating socially without marginalizing surveillance or spatial politics. Adam, Charity and Cristina cited their participation in student government - especially its large, multi-school meetings and workshops - as places where youth from all over interacted positively. Charity explained, “It’s nice to see how other people think. I felt comfortable, no one judged you based on
your color, race, anything - people just being yourself. People would just come up to you like, "Hi, my name is…" and you made a lot of friends.” Candace highlighted the diversity of students present at a summer academic program focusing on health careers offered at the Riverside University.

This past summer I was in this program called H-Care for high school students from around the Riverside area who all wanted to go into the medical field. And this group of people were all individuals who had their own thoughts, they dressed differently, you know what I mean, they were all smart - I didn't have to worry about that - and they all were just like, one was from China another from Africa - it was interesting to hear their stories about how they were going back home overseas to visit relatives and to hear them talking about their culture because it was so different than what I was used to hearing in conversations…and we are all still really close - I'm glad I went there…I formed relationships that I don't want to lose…I could just come in my sweats, my slides and a t-shirt, you were comfortable, someone would be rocking there with me…

Charity, the only student to have traveled out of the country, positively described home stays with European families on a three-week school trip that fostered international friendships and cultural understanding. Adam highlighted online chat rooms and interest-based online communities as places he formed diverse, respectful friendships. Dana described relationships with her diverse coworkers at Four Towers, a large amusement park,

We have some pretty intelligent conversations and it’s mind sharpening because we heed each other’s words and we actually listen and it’s not just "ugh, why are you thinking about that." And the people there I get along with so much better than the people at school. It’s so enlightening so refreshing to have honest feedback and not ridicule for what you have to say.

Four Towers sparked a great deal of support from other students as a place where you could be yourself and not worry about being excluded or judged based on race, class, or age. Note the following interchange:
Dana - …Everyone is all together down there - at the pick up stop - I was just sitting watching a DVD and this dude came up all nice and he was a White dude like, "Watcha watching?"

Briana - You'll be in line [for an amusement ride] talking to your friends like, "Oh I'm so scared to get on this ride" and there will be like 10 people in front of you like, "We are scared too! Let's all hold hands!"

Candace – Yes, because you are all having a good time and it’s all fun natured.

Dana- And people will be getting off [of the ride] and talking to you like "It ain't that bad, we just got off…” they got such good stuff there that you don't even worry about color at Four Towers… I'm not worried about if I'm going to be uncomfortable with this White person standing next to me. I'm worried about if I'm going to die on the Delerium!

Students felt similarly about the Banks, an outdoor mall across the Middlesmith River in Plainview, a neighboring city in a different state. Candace explained,

The Banks it not segregated at all. You go down there and depending on what movie comes out… you can see White people and Black people, you see White people hanging with Black people and you know you are there for the same reason, you know just to hang out and have fun, and you just relax.

Cristina agreed saying, “It’s so nice [at the Banks] because you can just be yourself and you don't have to worry about it like "I'm Black and I'm going to have to be worried about some guy looking at me like I'm ignorant.” Briana’s positive perceptions about the Banks were most telling,

You know the Banks is the only place I feel comfortable hanging with all of my friends… like my friends that go to Maple Valley High, my little White friends - because we still keep in touch and either they come over to my house or I go over to their house and I tell you all we are totally different but because we are different, that's why we are so cool with each other… we would always feel uncomfortable if we were to go out to the movies in Harper Ridge or I would feel uncomfortable if we were to go hang out in the mall because the first thing that everybody is going to say is “why are there ten White girls and one Black girl?” And it ain't even like it’s ten White girls who got on Air Force Ones [a Nike brand sneaker] and jeans - they are real White, like they got on Uggs [an Australian
leather boot], and stockings and short skirts with a hoodie in the winter like it's the real deal… I take my friends over there, like my friends I know in junior high that are Black and we meet up with my friends who are White and we have a ball down there and it’s like nobody looks at us funny whereas over here everybody is like, there's something wrong with that.

One of the many things that is so interesting about Briana’s comment is that she clearly distinguishes between the Banks and Riverside, “we have a ball down there….whereas over here…” Others in the group supported this distinction, that the Banks was a very different place from the rest of Riverside. Adam summarized the students’ general perception:

In Riverside the Black people and the White people they separate themselves but in Plainview you see them together, like you see Black people and White people living in the same building… you don't see that a lot in Riverside.

When I pressed students to explain why that was, why Plainview and the Banks were different from Riverside, Cristina explained, “Because it’s away from the drama in Riverside, its not part of anyone's territory.”

This point, made so clearly by Cristina, is important. Although the Banks is only a few hundred meters away from downtown Riverside, these adolescents perceived it as a world away. The Banks is separated from Riverside by a political, ecological, and economic border – the river. To get to the Banks by bus, you must pay more to transfer to Plainview city buses or cross a long, exposed walking bridge. The Banks is considered by students to be no-one’s territory, a neutral space not bounded by neighborhood loyalty, race, or culture. Moreover, students felt comfortable there with diverse groups of friends, signifying a more open and inclusive space made possible by its political, ecological and economic distance from the city. Indeed, the same sort of border applied
to Four Towers as it is not within Riverside city limits and requires some foresight for transportation; a few city buses travel to Four Towers but with increased fares and infrequent schedules. Though students perceived these areas as more open and inclusive, they were still economically exclusive, as access was more difficult for young people without discretionary income. This point will be further explored in the following section on socioeconomics.

Nevertheless, students’ spatial distinctions of places like Four Towers and the Banks point to the strength of the city’s racially and culturally stratified geography. The fact that students must cross borders outside the city to escape feeling marginalized, policed, and unfairly stereotyped highlights the power of their sense of Riverside as a place that does not offer them fair opportunities to recreate freely with their peers – either in groups of all Black youth or mixed race groups of teens. Importantly, students did not see Riverside as a place where they could freely congregate and meet diverse groups of friends.

**Exclusion and diversity in the city.**
Students were highly critical of places they felt were homogenous racially and culturally. Jefferson Center, with a student population made up almost entirely of African-American students, received the full force of their critique. Charity explained, “This whole school is the same, it’s a fashion show, everybody’s talking about what they got on – this school is boring, everybody wants to be just like everybody else, “Why you got them shoes on? You supposed to wear jewelry just like everybody else!” Dana agreed,

If you aren’t wearing Timberlands, Gucci – I mean I like this stuff but it’s like, “Oooh, what’s she wearing, she’s got those knock off brands….”
You aren’t free to be yourself because you are scared someone is going to start talking about you and when they do it just snowballs into something so much greater.

Candace summarized their feelings, “It’s like your own race can be the biggest critic. You go to another school where it is more diverse and you don't get as much crap… at your own school you take so much crap.” Dana argued for a restructuring of school policy to integrate the city schools better:

I think there could be more programs out there to integrate the schools, like a district-wide STP project where students from all over come together to do school-wide community service programs where everyone goes out and volunteers together - and it would open you up to a whole group of different group of people from all over…

These young people’s desire for a more integrated school environment points to their frustrations with the social climate at school. Based on their experiences in more diverse settings (summer programs, student government, the Banks and Four Towers), they argued that integrated environments are more welcoming and allow you to “be yourself.”

Researchers have interesting findings regarding these ideas. Bennett (2006) found that cross-cultural interactions or “bicultural competence” have been shown to positively impact African-American students’ achievement and development. Perhaps participants in this study recognized these benefits and valued spaces where cross cultural interactions are the norm. In her review of data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (N.C.E.S., 1992), Stearns (2004) found that “a large proportion of…students had positive views toward the opportunities for interracial friendship, but that the social organization of schools hindered the formation of friendships in some ways” (2004, pp. 416-417). This is certainly the case for students at Jefferson-Center, a
nearly all-African-American high school. And though many researchers have found over the years that Black youth typically choose Black friends (Quillian & Campbell, 2003; Wade & Okesola, 2002), students in this study suggest that spaces where interracial interactions are possible are important to their geographies. The Riverside geographies of this group of young people highlight the value students place on spaces where diverse friendships are fostered and accepted.

**Socioeconomics**

Children’s geographers agree that social class and economic status are central in shaping the spatial experiences of adolescents (H. Matthews, Limb, & Taylor, 2000; Pain et al., 2005; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). These findings rang true for young people in this study, especially when it came to consumptive space (places young people spend money), transportation and social economies. I present a closer and more focused look at the socioeconomics of participant geographies here and explore students’ complicated construction of consumptive space, their access to transportation, and the social economies fostered by family and friends that shape students’ lives in the city.

**Consumptive space.**

Although depicted as open and inclusive spaces, participants’ descriptions of places like the Banks and Four Towers are problematic. First, the implication that the only places to have fun are consumptive spaces points to the pervasive culture of consumption surrounding youth and adolescents. In fact, only city parks and the library were mentioned by participants as places they hang out that do not involve spending money, and those were only rarely mentioned. Chin (2001) laments that "Children and adults of all classes are increasingly faced with the dilemma that social participation
requires greater and greater levels of consumption, whether of food, services, merchandise, or images” (2001, p. 125). This was certainly the case with students in this study whose recreational places were almost always consumptive spaces. Additionally, a closer analysis of students’ discussions about consumptive space reveal complex processes of social and economic stratification, especially in terms of what was not said and by whom.

Before I investigate participants’ relationships between consumptive space and socioeconomic stratification, it is helpful to contextualize the relationships between teens, consumptive space and identity with Thomas’ (2005) research with adolescent females in Charleston, South Carolina. Comparing the consumptive practices of White and Black teenage girls, she finds that girls’ simultaneous resistance to and utilization of consumptive spaces reproduces economic, racial, and social stratification and identities. Although teens in her study lament the lack of better shopping malls, youth centers, and safe hangouts in their city, they also choose to idolize and patronize specific malls and shopping areas as a way of asserting identity. The choosing, she argues, “…is the mode through which social identity (gender, social class, race, usually heterosexuality) is made and qualified” (2005, p. 598). The adolescent females in Thomas’ study chose different consumptive spaces throughout the city that attracted patrons of similar age, class, and race – thus reinforcing their consumptive identities. Thomas argues that the construction of these identities is a result of politics at both the personal and societal levels, “To be clear, while spatial choice itself indicates agency, the process of spatial subjectivity is not one solely determined by girls’ agency. Instead, these spatialized practices manufacture social difference itself (2005, p. 598).”
Chin (2001) agrees that consumptive practices are complex products of broad social dynamics and individuals’ agency, “It has become increasingly evident that consumption is at once a hegemonic force deserving of condemnation and a realm in which people exercise considerable power and creativity” (2001, p. 10). What is interesting about teens in my study is that instead of using consumptive space to reproduce racial stratification, they viewed places like Four Towers and the Banks as sites where they could transgress racial and cultural stratifications. Young people patronized these sites because they were perceived as neutral, inclusive and respectful - not segregated, judgmental and exclusive. Thomas (2005) may argue, and I would agree, that the identity these students are trying to espouse with these consumptive practices is a more inclusive, open and diverse sense of self. For example, students like Adam, Dana, Candace, Briana and Crystal may demonstrate a more multicultural, multiracial social identity by hanging out at places where diversity and shared integrated experience is the norm. Thus, they argue places like Four Towers and the Banks are more their style and in line with their unique sense of what fun really means. This makes sense considering their positive experiences in other diverse areas like student government, Candace’s summer health sciences program, Dana’s integrated youth soccer teams, and Charity’s positive experience traveling and living abroad.

But sites like Four Towers and the Banks remain problematic for young people’s consumptive practices and identity formation. One still needs money to hang out in these places (or at least the perception of money, once you are there, you can hang out at the Banks without spending money). Adam couldn’t visit the Banks in the winter because he could not afford the additional bus fare to cross the river and wasn’t willing to brave the
cold walk across the bridge to the Banks. Notably absent from the discussion about Four Towers were Adam, Cristina and Valerie’s voices – three students living in low-income neighborhoods without personal vehicles for transportation. With admission to Four Towers almost $50 dollars per day, it is entirely possible that these three teens have never been through Four Towers’ gates. Even though the Banks and Four Towers are considered inclusive, fun, non-judgmental places to hang out, they remain exclusive for low-income youth who cannot afford steep admission prices or the transportation and recreation costs associated with hanging out there.

Another example of the entanglement of consumptive space and identity would be participants’ patronization of Starbucks. During an early focus group discussion, Briana described her map of the world and introduced her job at a large grocery store. She explained that at the store, the Starbucks coffee counter was her “favorite” place to work, “because I get all the free drinks I want.” When Candace shot Briana a light and scolding response wondering why she doesn’t “hook her friends up” with cheap drinks, Briana replied laughing, “I don’t treat my friends to free drinks.” Candace teased, “That’s why I don’t come visit you!”

A few moments later when introducing her map of the world, Candace explained that she visited the Starbucks near Jefferson Center every morning before school with Dana because “I’m addicted, I have to get my vanilla bean frap… it’s the best…whipped cream…” None of the other students mentioned Starbucks, but the distinction Candace made between her and Briana’s experiences there (Briana working for her free drinks, Candace purchasing a $4 drink every morning) certainly contributed to Candace’s ability to establish a more affluent consumptive identity than Briana.
Kneal and Dwyer (2004) explain that “Consumption is a meaningful activity which helps us create social identities and relationships with others; as we do this the things we consume are given human values” (2004, p. 300). Chin (2001) agrees here as well, “Consumption is at its base a social process, and one that children use in powerful ways to make connections between themselves and the people around them” (2001, p. 123). In this case, Candace seems to be making the distinction that she doesn’t need Briana’s free drinks, she has the time and money to purchase her own. Kneal and Dwyer (2004) explain that consumptive identities are communicated within specific contexts of space and time in order to communicate specific meanings. It is notable that Candace quickly followed Briana’s description of free drink benefits when working at Starbucks with her own description of a leisurely, indulgent, expensive patronization at the same chain coffee shop. Candace’s timing, so close in discursive time and space to Briana’s, suggests that she may be trying to say more about herself than that she is “addicted to Starbucks.” Additionally, Candace’s assertion that she goes to Starbucks with Dana makes a social distinction from Briana’s Starbucks experiences. Whereas Briana is working, taking on an employee role, Candace is experiencing Starbucks in a social setting, with a friend, as a patron.

McDowell (1999b) writes, “Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial - they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded...” (1999b, p. 4). The articulation of consumptive space – be it Four Towers, the Banks, or Starbucks - is a complex practice that not only describes places but can also identify, unify and stratify young people.
Transportation.

Transportation and access options are also related to socioeconomics and contributed to young people’s geographies of Riverside. Adam was familiar with and fond of the city’s larger parks because he had frequented them with his father during driving lessons. He also traveled extensively on city bus routes to visit video game stores and was acutely aware of the geographic location of neighborhoods, townships, and cities-within-a-city as they impacted the bus fare structure. Adam’s knowledge of the city was much different than the young women in the study who had not traveled as extensively through the city. Matthews (1992) explains that this difference is typical among teenagers; in terms of recreation, young men tend to travel greater distances from home than their female peers.

Many of the students were reliant on the city bus system for work and recreation. Candace and Adam were limited in their job search to positions located along convenient bus routes. Dana, Briana and Kayla-Jean were working part-time jobs successfully because of a combination of bus riding and parental transportation. Briana’s job was directly on her bus route to and from school. Dana and Kayla-Jean had parents with the time and resources (a personal vehicle) to help transport them home from late nights at work. Bus routes also influenced recreation; many of the young women in the study were frustrated that teen night clubs were located in the suburbs and not along city bus routes.

Kayla-Jean explained that she was limited in places to hang out with friends because of her parents’ rules and access: “Here are my restricted area places I’m not allowed to go, teen clubs, the Banks – I don’t have a ride, nobody to take me – and house parties, I’m not allowed to go to house parties.”
On a field trip earlier in the school year, Michaels took all the seniors canoeing at a large, county-run lake and park in the suburbs. Everyone enjoyed the trip to Crystal Lake but was frustrated that these large parks were not accessible via city bus lines. Fagg, et. al. (2008) explain that access to bus routes, shopping areas, and places to hang out are significant features in young people’s perceptions of their neighborhoods. This was certainly the case with students in my study and extended to their perception of the city as a whole.

**Social economies.**
Family, social relationships and personal responsibilities also influenced students’ geographies. Briana’s wide network of older friends and siblings had cars and were able to drive her to places on weekends; she described “exercising my right to be 18,” and hanging out at teen clubs and suburban bowling alleys. Dana explained how her family relied on old coworkers for entertainment benefits on their Friday “family nights:” “…we go down to the St. Martin’s theater where my mom gets free tickets because she used to work there, she knows everybody down there.”

Much of Valerie’s life revolved around her job at a grocery store near school. She was motivated by a sense of responsibility she felt for her nieces. Although she described work as “a place of stress,” she puts up with the anxiety in order to better her own and her nieces’ opportunities:

My main goal is to make sure my nieces are provided for, because my mama has custody of them. And she's got custody of them so I've got custody of them. Everybody knows that I take care of them basically and I know when my mama gets older she's not going to be able to provide for them the way she wants to and I know when I get older, one day I'm going to have to come into the picture for them. And I just want to be better – that's why I'm going to college - because of them. I know if my mama gets sick or something, then it will be upon me to provide for them and I
don't want to have to struggle in order to take care of them, so they are the reason I want to go to college. They push me to straighten myself out.

Although I did not collect data on participants’ or their families’ financial situations, it is clear that the spaces of after-school activities were open or closed to participants depending upon their parents’ economic status. Briana and Valerie had very intensive work schedules, they both talked often about their jobs and struggled to attend focus group meetings because of their demanding work schedules. Both used bus transportation exclusively to get to and from work. Aside from their participation in this study, neither Briana nor Valerie was active in school-sponsored after-school activities like sports or clubs. On the other hand, Kayla-Jean and Dana both had part-time jobs with less demanding schedules (Dana worked Saturday mornings during the school year and Kayla-Jean worked weekends) and their parents helped transport them to and from work. Kayla-Jean, Dana and Candace were all very active in sports, clubs and after-school activities. Adam was in night school in order to make up credits for an on-time graduation.

It is clear Valerie felt the need to make money to help her mother support her nieces. It is unclear why Briana felt compelled to work so much but Michaels felt it was because “the money for graduation and prom wasn’t coming readily from her parents so she had to supplement that with her income.” He was also clear that her long hours were a detriment to her schoolwork, “…no wonder that she doesn’t always have things ready or she hasn’t read the assignments…[a very heavy work schedule] is something that impacts her dramatically.”

On the contrary, Kayla-Jean, Dana and Candace were all participating in a college-prep program at school and took math and English classes at Riverside University
during the school day. They had time after school to complete advanced assignments and participate in clubs and sports. At one point, when Kayla-Jean, Dana, and Candace were sharing their maps of the world, Briana joked about their “homebody” social lives and many after-school activities, saying to me, “And you wanna know what’s messed up? These [Kayla-Jean and Dana] are the smart ones!” The perception of Kayla-Jean, Dana and Candace as the “smart ones” because of their participation in school-sponsored activities has interesting implications.

Guest and Schneider (2003) argue that in low-income schools, participation in athletics is perceived as a precursor to academic and collegiate success and in higher-income schools, participation in after-school academic clubs like newspaper and students government is perceived similarly. Though these researchers are exploring the relationships of athlete-identities, extracurricular identities, school socioeconomic contexts and academic success, their implications for Jefferson Center are important. Kayla-Jean, Candace and Dana are active in both athletics and academic extra-curriculars (National Honor Society, the college prep-program at Riverside University) and they are perceived by other students as “the smart ones,” destined for future academic and collegiate success. What is important to note here is that all three come from families who financially support their activities by helping out with after-school transportation and provide discretionary funds so the young women do not need to work long hours. I would not go so far as to claim that socioeconomic status directly shapes academic success but it is possible there is some relationship here. Certainly their parents’ financial resources and academic support for Kalya-Jean, Dana, and Candace made it easier for them to be involved in after-school sports and academic activities.
Socioeconomics played a significant role structuring participants’ geographies. Through their articulation of consumptive space, participants constructed stratified consumptive identities. Transportation options shaped their knowledge of the city and access to different jobs. Participants’ social networks opened new sites for recreation, enabled their participation in after-school activities and motivated them to work long hours at stressful jobs outside school. In some respects, these places became part of participants’ identity and impacted how others viewed them. In the next section I will look more closely at students’ complex relationships between place and identity.

**Place and Identity**

Throughout this analysis of young people’s geographies, identity has played a significant role; participants’ reproduce, challenge and reconstruct their consumptive, racial, and neighborhood identities. In this section, I will examine participants’ identities in relation to their neighborhood ideologies, school experiences, and racial and cultural communities.

Students used neighborhood characteristics and stereotypes to highlight similarities or make distinctions with their sense of self. Briana intertwined spatial and personal narratives of violence and danger to describe her neighborhood and identity. She described herself as someone with a foot in both a dangerous, violent, “ghetto” world and another in a calm, safe, middle-class world. In the following statement, she explains how her father’s neighbors in Linwood, a middle-upper class suburb were shocked that she hung out in Bridgedale because it was so dangerous:

I get a lot of people who ask me - my dad’s neighbors in Linwood always ask me, “Where do you hang out? What neighborhoods do you hang out in?” I’m like “I like to go to Bridgedale because that’s where my cousins live at” and they look at me like “Bridgedale? No, Bridgedale is a bad
neighborhood. What is such a nice girl like you doing in Bridgedale? Have you ever been robbed?” They look at me like I’m crazy.

Pinderhughes (1997) examines connections between youth identity and neighborhood ideologies, arguing that “community-based ideologies supply information to youth about how to interpret their experiences, their identities, and their relationships with other groups” (1997, p. 17). He suggests that place-based neighborhood ideologies provide racial and ethnic identities for youth and form the basis of the identities youth impose upon others based on their neighborhoods. It seems Briana was drawing upon dangerous neighborhood ideologies to construct her complex identity that includes both “nice” and “dangerous” elements. Similarly, when Adam recommended Dana not live in West Bridgedale, where “all the snooty-snoot White people live,” he was making assertions about who Dana is and where she belongs as well as establishing an undesirable ideology of West Bridgedale.

Still, students in this study made a point to distinguish themselves from neighborhood stereotypes. Charity explained that, “Even though I have grown up in the same type of neighborhood they [her peers] have, I feel like I have a totally different personality.”

School spaces also contributed to students’ sense of self. Dana described feeling a strong sense of power and confidence on the softball field, “I feel I’m flushed out, that’s something that I feel like I am good at, I am talented at, so it gives me a confidence boost when I’m out on the field.” Her athlete-identity was one of strength, resilience, and camaraderie. Heilman (1998) emphasizes the importance of power in the positive identity construction of young women like Dana. She argues that schools should be at the forefront of providing “an environment in which a healthy identity can be fostered”
(Heilman, 1998, p. 182). Swaminathan (2004) argues that the presence of free spaces within schools where students feel a sense of belonging and agency - like athletic teams and clubs - are essential to their academic success and ability to positively identify with school and the schooling process.

Identity construction is fluid (Conradson & McKay, 2007) and young people utilize place-based identities in order to further inform and understand who/where they are in their community. Nowell, Berkowitz, Deacon, and Foster-Fishman (2006) explain that “Place identity is defined as an aspect of self-identity in which a person uses objects and space to help him/her define who they are in society and in which places function as meaningful reference points in the development of personal identity” (2006, p. 40). In a very concrete example, Briana described how being around college students at Riverside University’s computer lab made her “feel really smart” because she knew that “everybody is in there for the same purpose and you are just sitting there typing, thinking “I’m just as smart as they are.””

Kayla-Jean defined “identity” as the answer to the question, “Where do I belong in my community?” She argued that for youth, the answer to this question could be found by studying one’s cultural heritage through involvement in community arts and history organizations. She felt that developing an understanding of African-American art and history through participation with community groups like the Riverside Black Theater Company would help African-American teens locate and identify themselves on a time/space continuum in terms of their cultural heritage, role in the community, and ability to positively contribute to society.
Briana used the concrete juxtaposition of Riverside’s grand Performance Hall and neighboring Columbus Park, a run-down city park frequented by drug-users and homeless people, to articulate her place-identity. She located herself in between these two spaces, walking a “middle path” because “I’m able to understand both sides…I’ve got to see the good times when everything is OK and I’ve got to see the worst times when everything is horrible and messed up.” She explained she needs the balance of the two to help her be a self-assured and confident person.

Matthews, et. al. (1998) further describe how students utilize spatial knowledge and experience to formulate identities:

Places become imbued with cultural values and meanings, affording not only a sense of identity, but also generating a sense of difference and of being special. The street corners, indoor shopping centers and vacant spaces of local areas may be seen as ‘cultural gateways,’ places whereby teenagers can meet and create their own identities. Adults may produce patterns of land use, but teenagers learn to operate within these settings and to ‘carve out’ their own cultural locations. In their physical worlds teenagers are active cultural producers (1998, pp. 196-197).

This was certainly the case for Adam who described finding like-minded friends in the comic book section of bookstores and traveled across town to meet video-gamers at stores where they could hang out, talk videos, and play games together. He also associated closely with his online avatar, a computer-generated image of himself, a visual expression of his identity that he used to meet and interact with friends on-line. Though not explored in depth in this study, Pain et. al. (2005) explain that technological places like Adam’s online games, chat rooms and social networking sites transform youth social experiences but are mostly extensions of relationships that are already there. Through this lens, these on-line and physical spaces and relationships helped Adam construct an identity based on his technological interests and savvy.
Gruenewald (2003) writes that “We live our lives in places, and our relationship to them colors who we are” (2003, p. 625). On many levels, students utilized places around them to understand others’ identities and create their own. Drawing upon socio-economic neighborhood ideologies, the emotional power of athletic fields, the historic and artistic experiences of their racial and ethnic communities, the networks of like-minded peers formed online, and the complex juxtaposition of symbolic locales in the city, students actively formed identities based on spatial belonging, differentiation, and ownership.

Ecological Places

Throughout this analysis of young people’s geographies, I have readily integrated four of Gruenewald’s (2003) five dimensions of place in my discussion. Students’ interpretations of Jefferson Center’s physical structures and environment exemplify the perceptual dimension of place. The racial and economic stratification students described in their neighborhoods demonstrates one facet of the sociological dimension of place. Students’ experiences of spatial control at area malls through curfews and the unequal treatment they receive due to their race and age speaks to Gruenewald’s (2003) political and ideological dimensions of place. In addition to students’ interpretations and descriptions, literature in the social sciences, cultural geography, education and psychology offered political, ideological and social lenses through which I could more closely analyze, interpret, and understand these findings.

Committed to a multi-disciplinary approach to understanding participants’ geographies, I duly noted the absence of an ecological perspective in my analysis. In this section, I will explore the significance of an ecological perspective in these young
people’s urban geographies by returning to Gruenewald’s description of an ecological dimension of place and reviewing how my understandings of it framed initial data collection, analysis and findings. I will also describe the challenges I encountered using ecological perspectives in the context of “doing” children’s geographies. Finally, I will explain how Braun’s (2004) summary of cultural geography’s scholarship on the relationship between nature and culture helped to reframe my understanding and analysis of the ecological dimension in participants’ geographies.

_Gruenewald’s ecological dimension of place._
In his “ecological dimension of place,” Gruenewald (2003) explores the nonhuman world and its relationships to the human world, referencing fields like bioregionalism and “dissident” ecological traditions (like social ecology, human ecology, environmental justice, ecofeminism) which utilize place as a context for understanding patterns of social and environmental degradation.

Hoping to explore ecological dimensions of my participants’ geographies, I initially tried to identify the “nonhuman” dimensions of students’ geographies. I underscored students’ references to or descriptions of places I considered “natural” or “ecological” like the city’s rivers, parks, and weather. In interviews and focus group activities, I sought to spark discussion and engagement with young people’s emotional, social, perceptual and political landscapes of parks, nature, and the river. I asked students to describe important natural spaces and paid close attention to times they incorporated the city’s environmental characteristics (flora, fauna, geology, and climate) in their narratives. What surfaced, for example, was Adam’s interest in local geology and everyone’s opinions of the city parks as clean, dirty, beautiful, or ugly. In addition, I
noticed participants mentioned large county parks when discussing issues of equal access and bus routes.

Because of his wealth of knowledge about the city’s neighborhoods and his familiarity with the city’s larger parks, Adam was most aware of the city’s geography. He had researched online the seven “hills” of Riverside and found out that geologically, they were considered to be plateaus. Having visited parks at the top of many of these plateaus and looked out to other visible plateaus, he was interested in knowing their names, associated neighborhood, and geographic locations.

Other students also described some of the larger city parks, especially the nearby Mt. Clemens Park with its popular overlook of downtown Riverside and the Middlesmith River. A large Midwestern river, the Middlesmith is usually brown. Briana interpreted this as meaning the river was dirty and explained, “I like [Mt. Clemens] better at night because when you walk around in the daytime and look out, it’s all pretty and beautiful but then you look down at the river and it’s all muddy and nasty…”

Students seemed to value city green spaces in terms of their size and natural features. Least valued were the smaller, inner city parks with play areas, basketball courts, a few trees and benches. More respected were the larger, multi-acre city parks with gardens, forests, and overlooks. Cristina explained, “There are some dirty neighborhood parks but I like the more natural parks like Mt. Clemens Park.” Even better were the large county parks like Crystal Lake where Michaels took students canoeing. Students were impressed with the size of the lake, its large, grassy picnic areas and facilities which include docks for fishing, wildlife blinds, boat rentals, and a lodge for large groups. But Dana wondered, “Why are the good parks so far out - like Crystal
Lake, Lake Louise – it’s so beautiful out there …” Everyone appreciated these places but did not consider them significant or relevant to their geographies because they were so far out of town. No one included a park or natural area on their personal map of the world.

With little access to or personal experience in natural areas, most of the females shared Charity’s sentiments when she said, “I don’t like forests, I don’t like nature.” When I asked for an explanation, most of the young women agreed with Dana who clarified, “I don’t like the woods… I don’t like to touch furry little animals.” Even Crystal Lake, a highly developed county park with bike trails, tidy concrete walkways and fishing docks which participants described favorably were devalued when Dana lamented, “but it is so nasty because they need a pooperscooper for all the goose crap out there - I'm afraid to step on it...” Adam was a little more interested in local fauna and excitedly shared a story of seeing deer when driving through Mt. Clemens Park. He was also enthusiastic about a coyote sighting his father had while doing trail restoration. Still, the woods were not familiar or significant to Adam; he was anxious about woods in Bridgedale because they seemed “silent,” “creepy,” and he was afraid “a crazy man or raccoon is going to jump out of those woods.”

McDowell (1999b) examines the experiences of women and women of color in rural and wilderness areas and uncovers similar findings, that women of color had generally negative and fearful associations with the countryside. She explains that some of these reactions are due to the countryside’s association with a racist and exclusionary cultural heritage. They are also shaped by the relationships between British Black identity and ideologies of the countryside and a mostly urban Black population that commonly experiences a sense of alienation from the countryside. Though McDowell
examines human relationships to landscapes far from urban communities, in this study when participants spoke generally about “nature” and “forests” they reflected a similar disinterest and fear.

Without parents or schools facilitating first-hand experiences with natural areas, participants’ in this study were limited in their exposure to ecological perspectives and issues. Their geographies of natural areas were limited to a few visits and stories about places focusing on accessibility, cleanliness, and beauty. Because of the lack of access to larger county parks located in Riverside suburbs, young people in this study were further limited in their ability to freely and easily visit areas with well-developed interpretive materials, historic information, and public facilities. In some respects, the ecological geographies of students, based on their access and interest in natural areas, were subject to the politics of city planning, the economics of financial support for natural areas, and the priorities of their schooling which did not incorporate local ecologies.

Gruenewald (2003) speaks to some of these issues when he argues for a comprehensive pedagogy of place - including ecological dimensions - in schools. Though I will discuss the implications of young people’s geographies for educators at the end of this chapter, it is useful to examine Gruenewald’s implications here in the context of ecological places. He warns that schools must take into account how their organization and structures,

… (a) limit the diversity of experience and perception; (b) cut children, youth, and their teachers off from cultural and ecological life; (c) reproduce an unquestioning attitude about the legitimacy of problematic spatial forms; (d) deny and create marginality through regimes of standardization and control; and (e) through their allegiance to the global economy, function to exacerbate the very ecological problems they deny (2003, p. 636).
It seems that in some respects, these implications were realized by students in this study. Ecologically speaking, they were unable to access and engage with the city’s ecological life and in turn were marginalized through the spatial organization of the city and the socio-economics of transportation and access.

*Cultural geography, nature and culture.*

Aside from links regarding access and exposure, it was difficult to find relevance between the data I was collecting from young people and Gruenewald’s ecological dimension of place. I had trouble finding ways participants’ geographies spoke to or demonstrated an ecological dimension of place. Part of the problem, I believe, came from my emphasis on non-human, “natural” places and place-characteristics like geography, flora, fauna and climate. I set up a very clear nature-culture dichotomy, looking to find “ecology” and an “ecological geography” in young people’s relationships with city parks, the Middlesmith River watershed, or their interest in seasons, climate, or agriculture – none of which they independently included in their geographies.

Cultural geographers have long been interested in the relationships between nature and culture and Braun (2004) summarizes four moments in the history of cultural geography that mark different understandings of those relationships. Studying his work helped me move through the nature/culture dualism in my own analysis by utilizing a framework which Braun calls “nonmodern ontologies” (2004, p. 169). This framework for understanding human and environmental ecologies helped me better address and approach the ecological dimension of participants’ urban geographies.

Though grossly summarized here, Braun’s four moments in cultural ecology include: cultural ecology, political ecology, cultural studies of the environment, and
actor-network theory ("nonmodern ontologies"). Together, they review how geographers have progressively explored relationships between nature and culture. Cultural ecology unified nature and culture into a functioning system, replete with cultural adaptations to environments and an understanding of the specific relationships between communities and their environments. Political ecology sought to situate these relationships in wider scales, taking into account the influences of society and politics on local communities. Cultural studies of the environment looked at the way nature is constructed through cultural practices and how those practices influence the social, political, racial, and economic lives of people and the way humans interact with and change their environment. All three of these approaches rely upon a dualistic understanding of nature and culture as separate entities. They were also somewhat unrelated to what I was trying to understand, the ways young people perceive their world and the more subtle ways nonhuman aspects of their community and city influence their geographies. It seemed to me the young people in my study - though clearly eating, breathing, and living a life tied to natural processes - didn’t envision themselves as ecologically situated. Their geographies did not reference any of these connections.

But Braun finishes his exploration with the concept of nonmodern ontologies, a theoretical moment that arrived because critics found themselves, …no longer able to say anything about what nonhumans contribute to the world, including to the social worlds of humans. To resolve this, some have suggested, it is necessary to abandon the ‘nature-culture’ problematic altogether, and substitute in its place a series of different concepts: hybrid networks, assemblages, abstract machines (2004, p. 168).

Essentially, nonmodern ontologies attempt to dissolve the construction of dualities like nature/culture and instead understand all things in terms of their associations,
interconnections, and ways of being together - one in the same. Braun explains, “rather than the relation between nature and culture presenting a puzzle to be solved, it is the division of the world into the ontological domains that needs explanation” (2004, p. 171). Importantly, it “suggests new avenues for ‘interdisciplinary’ research, not in terms of dividing the world into disciplinary domains and then struggling to bring them into relation, but oriented towards ‘bringing networks out of hiding,’ to the tracing of associations and translations” (2004, p. 171). Through this lens, different aspects of my participants’ geographies come into an interesting focus. Instead of looking at how young people mapped the natural world or located themselves as ecological participants, I began to focus on more intrinsic connections integrating young people with the ecologies of their lives in the city.

The role of the Middlesmith River as a political, social, and economic border is a good example. Crossing the river when going to the Banks transformed participants into less marginalized people, able to be welcomed and respected for who they are, not judged based on race or neighborhood. Students constructed that brown and dirty river - beautiful at night - as a transformative social marker, which when crossed, changes who they are and how they experience the world. Braun highlights this engaged and active way of being in the world and suggests that cultural geography, through nonmodern ontologies might need…

…new ways of imagining and creatively engaging in the world, a new postdisciplinary pragmatics that accepts our participation in the worlding of our world and our connections to the many other ‘actants’ who constitute our worlds and our humanity (2004, p. 175).
Braun’s focus on a philosophy that “attends to, and places us within, the creative becoming of the earth” (Braun, 2004, p. 175) provides a unique and useful way of understanding the networks (including ecologies) teens in this study were experiencing.

When asked to talk about “nature,” participants described it as something out there, beyond their day-to-day. It was something they were uncomfortable with and had limited exposure to. I knew that ecological elements were a part of their geographies but needed to find a way to engage them less directly. Braun’s description of this fourth moment in cultural ecology provided analytical opportunities for identifying complicated networks between place, environment, identity, and agency.

Adam’s geography of the city is shaped by the knowledge he formed reading Wikipedia to learn about Riverside’s geologic plateaus. Many of these plateaus – naturally scenic vistas – are part of city parks, places his father (a city employee caretaking these public spaces) is familiar with. From his father, Adam has stories of coyotes, deer and driving lessons in the parks. Adam’s knowledge of these parks and plateaus helps him locate and identify neighborhoods which in turn help him understand the geopolitical borders of the city. These are important because they impact changing bus fares (sometimes limiting Adam’s geographic range if he can’t afford a transfer pass) when he is attempting to move through the city in pursuit of a friendly video gaming rendezvous.

Dana, at home in Riverside and certain she will return, loves the city’s climate. Briana finds it “kind of gloomy,” but Dana, who loves the city, loves her job, loves her parents, finds it perfect, “not too hot, not too cold.” She worries about heading north for college and becoming the sort of person who needs to buy a “big old coat.” Weather is at
once quite physical, but also quite intrinsic, representative of the sense of belonging and familiarity Dana feels towards Riverside.

For Candace, the Middlesmith River signifies a historic marker once designating Riverside as a free territory for slaves. Crossing it meant one had reached “the north” and a slave’s freedom. But these geographic designations and borders are complicated in her perception of the city - a city she sees as highly segregated. Although the river has not moved, it doesn’t represent freedom to her, but a false border, “It's so… segregated…you would think we are up in the north but technically Riverside is in the south.” The dream of freedom and equity has not been realized by her north-side of the river experiences. Like her peers, Candace feels that when she crosses the river heading south, she steps out of the segregated north into the more welcoming community of Plainview – where she can hang out freely with her friends, without feeling marginalized. History, politics, diversity, and freedom are all implicated in Candace’s geography of the Middlesmith River.

Braun’s framework helps my analysis move beyond the term “ecological dimension,” which to me required the identification of “natural places” in participants’ geographies. Braun’s nonmodern ontologies illuminate the interconnectedness of people, place, and the nonhuman, highlighting the ways ecologies can be more interdisciplinary; rivers are watersheds, they are history, they are brown. Rivers are safety, they are boundaries, and they can feel cold, smell nasty, or look beautiful. Rivers are inspiring and heart breaking.
Young People’s Geographies

As evidenced by the diversity of themes and topics that surfaced from this exploration into the teenagers’ geographies, Children’s Geographies can provide researchers with dynamic narratives, analysis, and insights about young people’s sense of the world. In this chapter I examined the collective geographies of participants by looking at themes of home, school, neighborhood, city, socioeconomics, identity, and ecology. Continually contextualizing and informing these themes were issues of race, class, gender, and politics. This final section will summarize findings from participants’ collective geographies using the work of Philo and Smith (2003) and explore their implications for educators.

Micro- and macro geographies.

Philo and Smith (2003) argue that the bulk of work in Children’s Geographies approaches young people’s lives from either a macro-political or micro-political lens. Researchers studying children’s lives from an “adult-centered” and macro-political perspective look at the way social structures and the politics of the public sphere influence children’s geographies. “Micro-political” studies approach children’s geographies from a “child-centered” approach, focusing on young people’s personal experiences and everyday life.

Throughout this chapter, I have examined students’ geographies from both lenses, beginning with the micro-politics of the day-to-day places young people inhabit like home, school, neighborhood and the city. Students’ descriptions of the material and emotional dimensions of home, their perspectives on faculty and peer relationships in school, and their experiences of neighborhood safety and danger all focus on the micro-politics and micro-geographies of their lives. Also included are issues like young
people’s preferences for inclusive, diverse and open recreation sites and the way family economies shape young people’s transportation options and access to school activities and work opportunities. Finally, the ways participants create personal identities in accordance or difference from their neighborhood, school, and city ideologies demonstrate how intimate places and micro-politics shape young people’s daily lives, perspectives, attitudes, and identities.

Teens in this study also reflected on broader social structures and contexts including race, class, economics and history that contextualized their day-to-day experiences of life in the city. Students described the macro-politics of their geographies through their concern with city planning, segregation, school funding inequities, racial stereotyping, city borders and contested territories, and a historic understanding of culture, community and identity.

Philo and Smith (2003) argue that the most interesting and relevant work for children’s geographers can be found at the intersections between macro- and micro-political lenses:

…we should concentrate on connections between the micro and the macro, and that it is very much in transitions from the one to the other—transitions with a clear change of spatial scale and orientation built in—that many of the most interesting questions for a political geography of children and young people will reside (2003, p. 111).

My analysis of participants’ day-to-day geographies attempted to take Philo and Smith’s advice by contextualizing students’ geographies in broader structural scales. Examining the river as a historical, geopolitical, and ecological border of difference and exploring the complexity of spatial subjectivity and social stratification through
consumptive practices linked participants’ day-to-day experiences with broader political and sociological structures and ideologies, linking their micro- and macro-geographies.

Macro-politics were also present in the participants’ own narratives. Their reflections, discussions, and interpretations of their geographies demonstrate a deep understanding of how history, socioeconomics, power, and race shape their lives. Philo and Smith explain that often times it is the youth themselves who make transitions from the micro- to the macro-political in their process of developing a political self,

…personal experiences become political—one might say ‘politicised’—when individuals are able to stand outside their own experiences, reflect back upon them critically, and thereby judge how they relate to those of others in similar or dissimilar circumstances (2003, p. 111).

When Candace explained the ways White people form negative racial stereotypes of Black youth from the media resulting in her unfair treatment in public spaces (“we have to pay for that…”) she demonstrated her understanding of how the very personal experience of exclusion and supervision in public spaces was a direct result of broader social structures and racist ideologies. When Kayla-Jean defined identity as “where you are in your community” and then described her community in terms of African-American history, art, and political struggles, she linked a very personal sense of who and where she was with a broader sense of historical and cultural contexts. Frustrated with the differences they observed in school facilities and neighborhood environments, young people in this study attributed these inequities to larger-scale issues of segregation and the unjust allocation of educational resources across racially stratified communities. In these instances, students demonstrated their development as political actors, making connections between their personal lives and larger social, political, and economic structures.
Implications for Educators

There is a great deal of relevance between this chapters’ findings and education. I have argued before (Cole, 2009a) that the field of Children’s Geographies offers important insights to educators that can shape educational theory, curriculum building, teaching and learning, and student-teacher relationships. In this study, students’ geographies point to the importance of functioning and welcoming school facilities, positive and non-judgmental relationships with teachers and classmates, and spaces within schools (clubs, sports, activities) that are diverse and empowering. Findings from my study of students’ geographies also suggest a number of questions for educators working with young people. I will examine these issues below.

Students’ geographies of school were complex. Analysis examining the micro and macro politics of adolescent geographies highlights the unique role of schooling in young people’s lives. As a site where students spend a large portion of their days, the micro-politics of students’ day-to-day social interactions, academic experiences, and extracurricular opportunities suggest that the little things (teacher/student relationships, comfortable desks, functioning printers, and quality after-school activities) matter. And as a political institution, the macro-politics of school as a site of social and cultural reproduction representing broader social, political and economic structures (school-based segregation, equitable school funding, the association of schooling with the prison industrial complex) also contribute to young people’s geographies of schooling – and they matter as well.

Participants’ school geographies in this study demonstrated that relationships with peers and faculty shape school climate. Equally significant is the suggestion that school facilities matter a great deal; in adolescents’ geographies, school facilities reproduce
ideologies of racial, cultural, and economic stratification. Educators must be mindful of students’ sensitivity to the relationships, environments, and facilities that make up their schools.

Participants’ geographies of neighborhood and city demonstrated the importance of diverse, respectful spaces for teens to recreate and suggest that teens are highly sensitive to racial stratification and inequity across their community and city. It is important for educators to find ways to create spaces for cross-cultural interactions within the structures of school.

Participants’ socioeconomic geographies demonstrated the wide range of influences shaping students’ ability to work and participate in extra-curricular activities. Students would be well-served if schools could find creative ways to allow all students, even those with demanding after-school jobs, access to the positive, powerful, and academically successful identities formed through participation in extracurricular sports and clubs.

Participants’ ability to critically reflect on their personal geographies and the social, cultural, economic, and political structures shaping them should inspire educators to create curriculum that informs, engages, and challenges these perspectives. Young people are more than capable of exploring their own consumptive practices, identity constructions, and stereotypes in broad political, economic, and socio-cultural contexts.

The geographies of teenage participants in this study also raise a number of questions for educators to consider. Across all spaces they inhabited, youth were sensitive to issues of safety, inclusiveness, diversity, empowerment, and respect. How can educators make schools places that encompass and support these characteristics?
Swaminathan (2004) argues that “In order to be effective with at-risk students, urban schools… need to pay attention not only to creating a caring climate or an engaging curriculum, they need to facilitate free spaces that students can call “my place”” (2004, p. 60). How can schools be re-imagined as places that belong to students?

Young people enter the classroom with rich and complex experiences and understandings about the world around them. For educators, young people’s geographies offer unique curricular opportunities for making connections between students’ multiple sites of experience and their associated historical, economic, social, cultural, political and ecological contexts. They also speak to us about the significance of place in students’ lives both outside and inside of schools. Children’s geographies remind us that students need and want places where they feel included, empowered, and centered. They challenge educators to make our classrooms and schools such places.

Community and place-based educators argue that a locally-focused, participatory, problem-based approach can address issues like inclusiveness, empowerment, and belonging (Brooke, 2003; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998; Lewicki, 2000; Theobald, 2006). Place-based educators might also argue that the purpose of place and community-based education is to integrate, challenge, and further develop young people’s geographies of home, school, and community. It is clear from these case studies that the STP had very complex and rich geographies to work with; in the next chapter I will explore the extent to which Jefferson Center’s Second Tuesday Project influenced students’ geographies. There I will address the final question of my research by identifying how the community-based Second Tuesday Project shaped participants’ geographies and how young people’s sense of place contributed to their participation in the community-based course.
Chapter 5 - Community-Based Education and Children’s Geographies

The purpose of this study was to utilize spatial frameworks and research methodologies from Children’s Geographies to understand the relationships between two phenomena: community-based education in the schools and young people’s geographies. Specifically, I sought to understand: (1) the experiences of teachers and students participating in a community-based curriculum, (2) participating students’ geographies of home, school and city, and (3) the interactions between the community-based curriculum and students’ sense of place.

In Chapter 3, I examined the struggles, successes, and practice of the Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson High School, a community-based service and research project for 12th grade students. I found that the program was able to successfully eliminate barriers to students’ community involvement through its flexible scheduling, broad network of community contacts and expansive use of the city transport system. But inadequate curricular planning resulted in teachers’ lack of a “common language” or guiding theory for the project. Without a clearly articulated purpose and intent, teachers and students struggled to make meaningful connections between fieldwork, local issues and problems, community-based solutions and broader social, political, cultural and ecological contexts.

In Chapter 4, I presented case studies of four young people’s geographies which highlighted the diversity of teen’s experiences and perspectives of Riverside. Important themes shaping students’ individual geographies included parental restrictions, spatial politics, diversity, danger/safety, and transportation access. In Chapter 4 I also conducted a cross-case analysis of eight participating students’ geographies examining recurrent
themes and trends across individual cases. In doing so, I highlighted participants’ complex experiences and perceptions of home, school, the city of Riverside, and spaces in-between. Issues common to many students’ geographies included race, identity, diversity, economics and safety.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the intersections between students’ geographies and their experiences with the Second Tuesday Project. Specifically, I am interested in how participation in the Second Tuesday Project shaped (or did not) participants’ personal geographies. I am also interested in how participants’ geographies influenced their engagement with Second Tuesday Project curriculum.

As the individual case studies and collective cross-case analysis revealed, the impact of the Second Tuesday Project on students’ geographies varied. Individual case studies of Kayla-Jean, Briana, Dana and Adam suggested some significant connections between students’ geographies of Riverside and their experiences with the Second Tuesday Project; but like the students’ case studies themselves, these relationships varied widely. On the other hand, broad cross-case analysis of students’ geographies rarely referenced or related to students’ Second Tuesday Project experiences. Though the analysis was interesting and revealing in regards to students’ Riverside geographies, I identified very little evidence of relationships between students’ collective STP experiences and their perspectives of life in Riverside. In this section, I will re-examine the case study and cross-case analyses as well as data from teacher interviews, classroom observations, and the STP curriculum study from Chapter 3. I will describe the absence/presence of the Second Tuesday Project in participants’ geographies and explore the significance behind these relationships. I will also examine the surprising influence
of peer STP research on participating students’ geographies and additional insights from Jefferson Center teachers on the relevance of the project to students’ sense of place and community. Finally, I will examine more closely the reasons behind these findings – why students’ geographies and the Second Tuesday Project interacted in the ways they did.

**Students’ Individual Geographies and the Second Tuesday Project**
Case studies of individual students from Chapter 4 offered differing perspectives about the role of the Second Tuesday Project in students’ geographies. Highlighting the very unique experiences and geographies of Kayla-Jean, Dana, Briana and Adam the case studies suggest the Second Tuesday Project was present in students’ geographies. In some cases, there was a very concrete connection between students’ perceptions of the community and their STP experiences. In other cases, students with prior interest in their STP topic experienced significant changes to their world view and sense of place because of their participation in the project. Finally, similar to findings from the cross-case analysis which I will describe in the next section, other students’ felt their Second Tuesday Project experience had no impact on their geographies of Riverside.

**Direct Impacts**
In some cases, when asked directly about the Second Tuesday Project and their views of Riverside, students and teachers cited very concrete, direct examples of how the project altered their Riverside geography. Dana’s work with the Urban League and its partner organizations dedicated to reducing neighborhood crime was a good example of these influential relationships. One of her organizations emphasized neighborhood environmental improvement (trash pick up, sidewalk upkeep, storefront/front yard clean up) as a way of reducing neighborhood crime and violence. Dana’s mentors toured
Riverside neighborhoods with her to illustrate how small environmental changes like lighting, trashcans, green spaces, and tidy streets and sidewalks reduce crime. These experiences made a big impact on the way she viewed her city:

I think my view changed because of my own work, my research… I think the Second Tuesday Project and working with my organization really opened my eyes to the situation that little tiny things in a community can create really big problems. And if we can get it cleaned up it could be a really nice place, not as much crime.

Dana felt her Second Tuesday experience altered her perspective of Riverside’s neighborhoods and citizens by heightening her awareness to neighborhood conditions:

It [her view of the city] changed it a lot because, usually walking down the street I wouldn't pay any attention to housing, I would just think "oh that's just another dilapidated house" or something like that. But now you look at it like “that's one dilapidated house that isn't going to get fixed up and there's another one run down next to it” and you are like, “whoa this neighborhood is going south and everything…” And if the city isn't doing anything about it then this is going to turn into another hot spot for gang violence and everything. Like walking downtown, I don't like walking downtown at night. I don't even go downtown that much except for the fair. Going downtown you see a lot of trash on the streets and everything and you think, “it’s downtown Riverside!” If we don't get this cleaned up then downtown is in jeopardy of becoming one of those dilapidated parts…

Dana credited her participation in the Second Tuesday Project for helping her develop a “more knowledgeable” and “realistic” view of Riverside.

Michaels was enthusiastic about experiences like Dana’s where students had interesting and inspiring adventures as part of their Second Tuesday Project. He explained that in these cases, strong personal connections to people and issues in the field likely contributed a great deal to the ongoing development of students’ perspectives, geographies and understanding of community issues:

I think the kids that have worked with children, in day care centers and elementary and preschools, and the folks that have had contact with
specific clients whether it’s homeless people or abused women - some of our kids got to do things that, gosh, we never got to do in years past - they actually went on home visits and stuff. And some of the girls sat in on group sessions where battered women were talking about their experiences - again I'm just amazed that [their agencies] let them do that. I think that had to give students a tremendous insight about life and about relationships and about why women stay with abusive men…. becoming aware of that phenomenon was really eye-opening for them.

Michaels asserts that many students had transformative experiences as part of the Second Tuesday Project. Though data suggests students’ experiences were more complex and varied, Michael’s optimism points to the potential of the project that he projects when reflecting on its relevance and purpose. And certainly an example like Dana’s, with a field experience directly impacting the way she perceives and interprets Riverside’s neighborhoods, is a testament to the very real potential of the STP to inform and enhance participants’ geographies.

*Expanding and Enhancing Geographies*

Similar to Dana, both Briana and Kayla-Jean reported significant changes to their sense of place and perceived role in their community due to experiences with the Second Tuesday Project. Unlike Dana though, both Briana and Kayla-Jean were already interested in and sensitive to the issues they explored through the project. In these cases, students’ interest and motivation resulted in very valuable learning experiences that significantly expanded and enhanced their geographies.

A sensitive and compassionate person, Briana was already interested in community and social issues before the Second Tuesday Project began. She was a volunteer cheerleading coach for girls from underserved communities because she felt the girls “needed something positive to do.” She was inspired to research the foster care system through the STP because of her emotional response to the murder of a young boy
in the city’s foster care system. She explains that she wanted to learn more about “how and why people help foster kids.” Working with a foster care support agency as part of her STP, she interviewed case workers and volunteer child advocates. Initially angry and upset about case workers’ failure to keep foster children safe, Briana explains how her research changed that perspective:

It [her STP presentation] was hard to get up there and talk about the murder without emotion because when I first heard about it I thought, "those case workers aren't doing their jobs.” But the more I researched it and found out about what case workers' days are like the more I understood about what it takes…

Briana described the social workers’ extensive case loads, their passion for the job, and their willingness to go to great lengths to protect children in the system. In the end, she developed a profound respect for their work. She explains, “It [the STP] was cool, it was real inspirational. That will be something I want to do when I come back from college. I want to do it as a profession. I’m majoring in social work.”

Kayla-Jean had long been interested in issues of African-American identity. She attributed this interest to family stories about African-American history and culture as well as the support of relatives who fostered an interest in books by African-American authors. Wanting to further these interests, Kayla-Jean’s mother suggested she work with the Riverside Black Theater Company for her Second Tuesday Project. Kayla-Jean’s fieldwork and associated research focused on issues of African-American youth and identity. Kayla-Jean described how her research, especially interviewing employees of the theater company, changed her view of her peers and community:

I don't hate my race at all but I used to think that we were so ignorant, I don't mean that in a negative way, I used to be so unaware, but now I see what the problem is - where the problem starts and where this community tries to help out…it [her research and fieldwork] allowed me to see how
my community functions, because I live through it - I see it everyday. I'm around people who are disrespectful and it's sad because all we are doing is disrespecting each other and we should be uplifting each other. And my main interests are the females, they hate on each other so much, they talk about each other so much… We are Black women and we are dying every day from AIDS, from breast cancer, we all need to be helping each other out… you are calling this woman a whore and you should be helping her out… it's so negative. But you have to understand it comes from [the fact that] they don't like themselves, they have issues with themselves and it all goes back to the Black identity, family structure, and something isn't right at home and so they want to inflict pain, a verbal assault on other people, make them feel bad because they aren't feeling good – it’s not fair but that's just how people are.

Kayla-Jean also made connections between her field experiences with the Riverside Black Theater Company and independent reading outside of school. When describing the theater company’s upper-income patrons, she explained,

It’s similar to another thing I read in a book, some African-American artists have written about this – the profit – and how some artists are profiting off of their work but that it should more be about the art and your talents, not something that costs.

Like Briana, Kayla-Jean felt that the knowledge she gained through her research as part of the Second Tuesday Project would have long-term implications for her future academic and career interests. She wanted to take classes on African-American culture and history in college. And she felt that her STP experience contributed a great deal to her understanding of her community, “...after doing this paper, I think I grew a lot from it as far as my attitude towards the African American community and my attitude towards myself.”

What is interesting about Briana and Kayla-Jean’s experiences is that their STP topics already had significant emotional or cultural significance to them. Briana was already committed to the welfare of the underserved and interested in the plight of foster children; Kayla-Jean had long held an interest in her African-American identity, history,
and culture. Kayla-Jean explained, “My experiences this year allowed me to see how my community functions – I see it everyday.” The project helped Briana and Kayla-Jean better understand and personally connect with issues they considered important. As a result, both young women considered their experience to be meaningful and valuable to furthering an understanding of their communities and themselves. By linking their interests to broader community issues, volunteering with a related local agency, and creating a research paper and presentation that highlighted the community connections they made, Briana and Kayla-Jean were doing exactly what Michaels and Patterson had outlined in their goals for the Second Tuesday Project. As a result, the experience changed the way they identified themselves as members and citizens of their community and city.

Michaels felt that these personal connections to STP issues both inspired and impeded students’ participation and learning. He explained, “So many of these kids live this life. I think for some of them it just reinforces poverty issues and hunger issues and disparity issues that they are well aware of already because of their own personal circumstances.” Michaels felt students responded in complex ways when the STP issues directly related to their daily lives:

I think [students familiar with STP issues] are both a little more engaged and a little more removed. I think there are some students who having been poor, being poor, want to know why there is poverty… And so I think they dig deeper into it. On the other hand I think there are some kids who say, "I live this every day, I can write about this and I don't need to do much research." It’s sort of like a baseball player writing about how to play baseball so they try to write a paper without much work on their behalf. I would say by and large though the kids learn - are driven to learn - more because of their circumstances, just to try to understand their world a little more - "Why did my father leave? Why does my father batter my mother? Why does my mother drink?" By finding out more about these
issues, I think they are satisfying their own curiosity about their own set of circumstances.

Kayla-Jean’s research was related to her personal understandings of race, community and identity; she was certainly living her issue and inspired to learn more about it as Michaels suggests. Briana was able to see herself in the role of a case worker and was very sensitive to the plight of foster children. These connections made their work all the more meaningful and transformative.

Part of what may have made students’ learning so significant and these personal connections so meaningful is the association with students’ sense of self and identity. Both Kayla-Jean and Briana explained that they were learning something about themselves, as well as their communities, through their STP research. Umphrey (2007) suggests that this is an essential component of community-centered education, arguing that when school work is focused on community, educators…

…elevate the importance and dignity of the work [students] do in school. We link their schoolwork both to identity formation and to reality - but maybe "link" is too puny a word. Identity and reality are - like school and culture - not things but activities. When we get it right, we learn by creating ourselves - not out of nothing but out of the places we, literally, find ourselves, the cultural and material nexus that shapes us, limits us, and entices us to contemplate a thousand horizons (2007, p. xv).

By linking personal interests with community contexts, Briana and Kayla-Jean were able to locate themselves squarely in the midst of their STP issues, research and field work. The Second Tuesday Project thus provided valuable insights for students like Briana and Kayla-Jean; through the project they were able to richly expand their sense of self and community.
Limited Impact on Geographies

Unlike Dana, Briana, and Kayla-Jean, other students did not describe such concrete changes to their geographies through the STP. Experiences were more similar to Candace and Charity’s, whose interest in literacy and obesity led them to organizations where they tutored elementary students and helped out at a YMCA after-school program. Once on-site, they made few connections between their initial research questions and field experiences. When asked about her STP experience, also at a YMCA youth program Cristina explained,

[My mentor] just sort of put together stuff for us to do and it was kind of like, “what you see is what you get”; there wasn't anything to go into depth with. She wasn't like, "Why don't you guys think about how [obesity issues and YMCA youth programs] interact" - and so we were usually tired and we didn't really put any effort into it, we were just like her little assistants…I sort of regret that I chose that, I mean you can learn stuff from it, but I wish I had gone to a more interesting agency.

Whether due to unfocused research questions, insufficient interviews, unsuccessful mentor relationships, or participants who “didn’t really put any effort into it,” students like Cristina were unable to identify linkages between their field experiences and broader issues. In their final presentations, Cristina and others relied upon national statistics about obesity (“one in four American children are obese”) and general information about their topics and did not include experiences or examples from their fieldwork. Though they cited national literacy and health campaigns as solutions to problems, there was no local context to their research and solutions were unrelated to the local community. Thus, Michaels’ overarching question for the project, “How do we provide a decent life to people in our community?” was not addressed by students. In fact, the curricular emphasis on the local community was entirely missed by students like Candace and Charity. When asked how the STP contributed to her understanding of the community,
Candace explained, “Most of us were addressing global issues, not just Riverside so it actually didn't really change.” Thus, the project became more general than relevant, more obligatory than transformative.

When asked whether they found value in the project, Valerie argued a definitive, “No.” Candace offered, “Somewhat,” and Dana explained it was “Hit or miss,” to which Candace added, “[the teachers] they should follow up and check on the agencies and make sure the students were really doing something - they should be finding out if they are actually doing something.”

This sentiment that the STP involved a lot of “sitting around” at their agency was fairly common. Adam complained that his “best day ever” at his STP agency was a day where he was given some fliers to post. Dana was frustrated that she spent her time “spinning in my chair, reading brochures and watching my mentor work at her computer.” Patterson addressed this issue as well:

You know some of these kids think that when they go out, they are going to confront the father that’s not paying [child support], or they are going to change somebody. But really when they are volunteering at an agency sometimes they’re not going to save the hungry person, they are just going to stock the cans on the shelf. And they don’t like that, you know they want to be more involved. But you do what you need to do. Some of the kids like the tutoring better because they are interacting or playing with kids. And when they are out there with domestic abuse agencies or 241-KIDS, they are filing papers…they are not meeting people, they are not hearing stories, they aren’t swapping stories. So that’s disappointing for some of them because they think they are good listeners. They want to counsel – it’s like no, you do what you can to help your organization - and that’s hard for them to realize.

A key point I think Patterson and the students miss here is that even the most mundane activities, if contextualized, can be meaningful. Although Dana felt like she didn’t do a whole lot on site, as I explored previously she certainly felt that her STP
experience changed the way she viewed her neighborhood communities and the city of Riverside. Other students jumped quickly to conclusions without looking carefully at the complexity of their issues. Frustrated with unsuccessful job hunting efforts and the inefficacy he observed at his field site workforce center, Adam claimed that his STP “actually showed me we are worse off” and concluded that Riverside has little to offer youth in the job market. Adam’s dismissal of the project was a good example of the students Michaels described as arguing “I live this everyday, I can write about this and don’t need to do much research.” For students like Adam and those Patterson describes as frustrated with their mundane field experiences, I believe curriculum helping students contextualize field experiences with their organization’s overall purpose and broader community issues could have enriched students’ STP experiences.

Patterson argued that although many students did not engage fully with the project and considered it of little value, some gained insight or “an awareness” about community issues, contexts, and solutions. She also described a latent aspect to their learning, suggesting that some students’ awareness of community issues may be more meaningful later in their lives.

For some [students] it doesn’t look like anything is happening while they’re doing their research - nothing except frustration, anger. But in the end some of them really do develop an awareness and are affected by their experience. I can’t give you a number, I can’t say 10%, it could be only three students - but you know that’s three more involved citizens. And for the others it may be under the radar right now, but there’s an awareness.

Although Valerie asserted that the project had little value in terms of students’ geographies, she agreed with Patterson that the project raised participants’ awareness of community issues.
I did think that students being at different places opened up a lot of things in life. For example, one person did their [research] on homeless people and they really showed that not all homeless people are bums or drug addicts; there is a reason why people are homeless. [The Second Tuesday Project] just makes you think about a lot of things - I think it opened our eyes on different things like how what you do now determines your future.

For students like Adam, Cristina and Valerie, the Second Tuesday Project offered little to inform, challenge, or expand their understanding of Riverside communities. Because of students’ lack of effort, inability to make connections, or the absence of curriculum more supportive of their field work and research, the project failed to contribute to their Riverside geographies. Even so, Valerie and Patterson’s responses suggest that the Second Tuesday Project may have had a more subtle influence on students’ sense of place, helping them develop an awareness of issues that may become more meaningful as they progress in their education and experience.

Cross-case Analysis of Students’ Geographies and the Second Tuesday Project

Cross-case analysis of the eight participating students’ geographies demonstrated very rich and complex narratives of home, Jefferson Center High School, Riverside neighborhoods, the city of Riverside, social economies, place and identity, and ecological landscapes. Through cross-case analysis, I described students’ reflections on school facilities and school social climate, neighborhood safety, and neighborhood politics. I highlighted students’ shared appreciation of diverse and inclusive spaces for youth in the city and their critique of places they felt marginalized or excluded because of their race, age, friends or ideas. Students were sensitive to economic stratification and politics in Riverside; they reflected critically on spatial access and public transport, urban development in low-income neighborhoods, and racially stratified and inequitably funded schools.
These rich geographies were shaped by students’ experiences through work, extra-curricular activities, family life, and their individual experiences as students, consumers, and Riverside citizens. But it is difficult in the cross-case analysis to find any evidence that the Second Tuesday Project or any school curriculum was contributing to students’ ideas of the city. The absence of the Second Tuesday Project from Chapter 4’s cross-case analysis is significant. In this section I will examine the potential places it could have been present and why it was not. I will examine issues with my data collection and analysis methodology as well as the STP curriculum that may have contributed to its absence in students’ collective geographies.

Focus Group Discussions and Research Methodologies

A key source of data for the cross-case analysis was students’ focus group discussions. These lively dialogues covered a range of topics and discussion time was distributed fairly equally among students. Although it is problematic to draw conclusions based on information not shared in a group discussion due to the myriad of reasons individuals choose not to discuss certain topics, the repeated absences of the STP from focus group discussions I describe below are significant. I believe the absence of the STP points to a plausible argument that in some cases students did not apply their STP experiences to our forums focusing on geographies in part because there was little or no connection between the Second Tuesday Project and their sense of place.

When Candace described the unequal allocation of school funding, she did not cite her STP experiences tutoring elementary students at an under performing, low-income, and poorly supported neighborhood elementary school. She based her comparison instead on visits to other schools during athletic competitions:
When I go to other schools like Lakeview, I want to know why they get all that stuff and this is all we get! It makes me mad because they have all that new technology and I was looking at one classroom and every desk had a computer at the desk and they weren’t bootleg computers like the ones we have here – they were high tec stuff and they get new books and their sports, their uniforms are better. They have more choices of what they want to do after school, and all we have is the basics.

When Candace and other students described their difficulty finding jobs accessible by city bus (“I’ve been looking for Thomas Plaza jobs because its on my bus route, so I can get picked up late at night - so I can hop on the 69 because that’s my main way of getting home…”), Adam did not mention his STP organization’s role trying to help youth find jobs, giving them bus tokens to find work, or even his concerns expressed during an individual interview about the agency’s job postings: “There are places they [the job support agency] say that are hiring… and you’ll see a sign that says they need a resume or its not on the bus line.” His experiences at the youth workforce development/employment agency would have been relevant to these discussions.

Discussing neighborhood racial stratification and safety during focus group sessions, Candace describes the physical differences between two economically and racially distinct neighborhoods,

All you gotta do is just ride down the street, for example, Center Avenue in Eastside. All you have to do is ride down it and you can see a difference - the street connects Eastside to Bridgedale and you can tell when Bridgedale starts and Eastside stops because its like here's the green grass and you can just tell.

Adam and Valerie also described the physical environment of their “ghetto” neighborhood of Bridgedale, explaining how all the old friendly candy shops and small businesses have closed and are now abandoned and in disrepair. In these instances, we
do not hear Dana’s voice sharing insights from her STP research on urban environments and the relationship between building abandonment, disrepair, poverty and violence.

I would have thought that if the Second Tuesday Project had been contributing to students’ views of their city, evidence of those connections would have been more present in their collective geographies and discussions of their shared environments. When I asked directly about students’ STP experiences during interviews and focus group sessions, students certainly could speak to lessons learned from the experiences and how the STP altered their perceptions of the city. But I was very aware that through the more general data collection tools I was using to understand students’ geographies (mapping, brochures, word associations) and their subsequent group discussions, the Second Tuesday Project was rarely referenced. Perhaps I, like the classroom teachers, missed opportunities to encourage these connections. In the three instances cited above, I could have asked directly about Candace’s STP elementary school, the relevance of Adam’s work-force development agency for his job-seeking peers, or Dana’s STP research on urban environments, helping students transfer STP insights to our discussions.

Unless I addressed it directly, students did not volunteer or incorporate knowledge gained through their Second Tuesday Project during our interactions. I noticed its absence in my initial data analysis; I reflected on the lack of discussion relating to the STP while focus group sessions were in progress and again immediately afterward when transcribing our conversations. I tried to redirect subsequent questions and discussion topics by directly referencing the project, “How does the STP impact the way you view your community/city?” To these direct questions, students readily offered clear and
direct answers, both positive and negative. But rarely did the students independently reference the Second Tuesday Project when discussing their geographies.

I think there are a few reasons why the Second Tuesday Project was not present in the cross-case analysis. In some cases, I believe the Second Tuesday Project was not substantial enough in terms of time spent in the field, time spent reflecting on experiences and time spent integrating findings with students’ prior knowledge in order to significantly impact the way students’ viewed their environment. One day per month of field time and very little focused class-time processing field experiences did not provide enough opportunity for many students to further their understanding of Riverside and its communities. As I described in Chapter 3, I think the project was not sufficiently contextualized in students’ day-to-day experiences and broader community issues to significantly influence most students’ geographies.

In addition, it is worth re-examining my research methodology. A critical source of data for this cross-case analysis came from focus group sessions. It may have been the case that during these discussions, students did not consider Second Tuesday Project knowledge or insights relevant. Students most often shared information from primary sources (i.e., Briana’s friends getting shot, Adam’s adventures with his father, Dana’s dynamic work environment) instead of information gathered through research or school work – secondary sources. Also, the information shared during discussions often reflected more dramatic narratives (violence, shootings), not the more subtle. For example, when Adam and Valerie described the continual decline of their “ghetto” neighborhood of Bridgedale during a focus group session, Dana and Candace who lived in significantly less dangerous neighborhoods were silent.
Adam – I used to not hear so much shooting, now you hear shooting…

Valerie and Adam together – Every night!

Adam – Especially where I live on 8th Street, I hear it all the time.

Valerie – It never fails…

It is possible that our group dynamic indirectly valued more first-person, dramatic, narrative storytelling instead of information gathered through secondary school-related sources. When students did discuss their Second Tuesday Project, it was only when I asked them directly about the curriculum during focus group sessions or when we discussed their STP experiences during individual interviews. It seemed clear from their individual case studies that the STP experiences significantly shaped Kayla-Jean and Briana’s geographies. But there was no evidence of this in my cross-case analysis. It is possible that insights from the STP did not transfer to our more informal, narrative-driven, group discussions.

Individual students’ experiences through the STP may also have been regarded by students and me as too dissimilar to peers’ experiences for consideration in group discussions or cross-case analysis. Because students were assigned to their own STP agencies with unique research questions and experiences, it is very possible students considered their learning too personal and unique, distal from the more common shared experiences of neighborhood safety and violence, after-school activities, and work environment. And because individual STP experiences were so different, it is likely that these experiences were overlooked as relevant themes/trends when I analyzed case studies in search of shared and similar themes for the cross-case analysis.
Nevertheless, I believe that the absence of the Second Tuesday Project in the cross-case analysis of students’ geographies is significant. I believe its absence demonstrates that due to the nature of my data collection and analysis or the STP’s curricular challenges, in some cases the community-based project did not make meaningful contributions to students’ geographies of Riverside.

Influence of Peers’ Research

One surprising aspect of the STP that did influence students’ geographies was their peers’ research. Students may have found little significance in their own work but many described their peers’ research as important, meaningful and transformative:

Briana: [The Second Tuesday Project] opened my eyes to things I hadn't thought of - like Dana’s presentation on violence and how clean your community is. If you wrote those two things down - litter and crime - on a piece of paper and said there was a connection someone would look at you like you are crazy. Who would have ever thought that the amount of litter could contribute to people dying in your neighborhood - learning something new. When she was talking about it, you were like, “that's not right,” but then you think about it, most neighborhoods that you drive down and there is trash on the ground….bad things happen in those neighborhoods…

Valerie: I did think that students being at different places opened up a lot of things in life. For example, one person did their [research] on homeless people and they really showed that not all homeless people are bums or drug addicts; there is a reason why people are homeless. [The Second Tuesday Project] just makes you think about a lot of things - I think it opened our eyes on different things like how what you do now determines your future.

In the research projects Briana and Valerie cite above, both presenters gave very clear, cohesive presentations. The presenters neatly threaded together the history and contexts of a local issue, the role of their organization addressing the issue, the student-researcher’s personal experiences with the issue in the field, and viable community-based solutions. The researcher’s personal connection to the issue and their experiences in the
field seemed persuasive as audience members could envision themselves located similarly. This was the case with Briana’s research presentation; she grew very emotional describing the young boy’s murder which inspired her research into the foster care system and commitment to social work. As an audience member, Kayla-Jean responded strongly:

Briana's presentation, I was sad for real… when she got up, it was intense, because my mom was a foster parent, and my aunt is one now and she used to watch that boy - she had to let him go because she was just a rest house for in between times, she couldn't keep him because she had older kids… it was deep to listen to that because my aunt knew him, so then to hear more about it from Briana…

I was initially critical about the many different agencies involved with the Second Tuesday Project; it meant Michaels and Patterson lost some control over the quality of field experiences. The diversity of placements and research topics also seemed to make it difficult for Michaels and Patterson to foster meaningful classroom conversations that moved beyond simply reporting field activities. As described earlier, I also struggled in my cross-case analysis to identify similarities in the ways students’ geographies were shaped by the STP because students’ experiences with the project varied so dramatically. Thus, I was impressed and excited to witness the importance participants attributed to each other’s work. Projects and presentations that successfully made connections between familiar problems, field experiences, and community-based solutions really resonated with the student audience, defending the importance of a diversity of field sites and research topics. Even though students did not physically share their peers’ STP experiences, they related to the issues and contexts involved and their colleagues’ perspectives. The most well-constructed projects proved transformative for audience members as well as the researchers themselves.
Additional Perspectives from Teachers

Participating teachers offered additional insights about the Second Tuesday Project. The Human Services program facilitator, Spillings, felt that students were gaining valuable experiences simply by being in the field. He explained that by getting out of the classroom and working alongside community members, students felt a stronger connection to their community and gained a better understanding of the adult working world.

Any time you get a student into a new environment it’s beneficial. Probably for you, certainly for me, when we look back at high school, junior high, we remember our field trips - a lot of them, maybe not all of them. Imagine a field trip that was a service opportunity that was repeated seven or eight times or maybe in the future weekly for maybe 30 weeks. The ties you build, the understanding you have of adult working relationships… that's what you want, that's what you want your high school to do, to be a partner with your community. That's what it should be. It sort of seems strange that school is so isolated from our community - that we take kids and say, “go do that [elementary school] and then go do that [high school] and then come join us…” When the community should be saying, “let's help you do that, let's help you do that…”

As a program facilitator, Spillings was interested in the more general aspects of the program: getting students out of the classroom, building relationships with community organizations, and exposing students to new people, situations, and experiences. He felt that entering the adult working world could change the way students saw themselves and their communities.

Probably the most descriptive, significant, and surprising connection made between the Second Tuesday Project and participants’ geographies came from Michaels’ own engagement with the project. When discussing the relationships between students’ geographies and their STP participation, Michaels reflected on his own transformation as a citizen through his facilitation of the project. Having lived his entire life in Riverside,
Michaels’ geography of the city was fairly well established prior to implementing the Second Tuesday Project. But working with students and community agencies through the project significantly altered his sense of place:

I’m more comfortable in the city now. As I walked through the city years ago I may have been a little paranoid, a little nervous about walking in certain areas. But having been downtown over the years to go to the soup kitchens, to go visit students down there and see what they are doing when they are out in the workforce, I’ve gotten to know some of the people who live and work down there and we've gotten to hear from some of the people who have been homeless, who are homeless…so I feel more a part of the city than ever before. I guess to answer your question, it’s made me feel a stronger tie to the city than I have before.

In my estimation, this is the strongest evidence I have found to support the idea that community-based education restructures participants’ geographies. It is clear that Michaels’ sense of belonging, feeling of ownership, and role as a citizen has been transformed directly by his participation in the Second Tuesday Project. It is very interesting, and perhaps problematic, that this most direct connection comes from the program’s lead teacher. As the most involved faculty member facilitating students’ fieldwork, he has become extremely familiar with the city’s social agencies and clients, as well as their associated neighborhoods, struggles, and successes. As a representative of Jefferson Center and his program, he has developed a wide network of colleagues and community partners. His sense of responsibility for and commitment to the project has provided him with a strong sense of purpose; through community activities like facilitating field placements, checking on students in the field, and ensuring their safety and productivity he has become a very engaged, involved citizen.

I consider Michaels’ assertion problematic because it suggests that such a transformative change in one’s geography requires significantly more involvement and
personal investment in the project then what students experience. Is it possible for
students’ geographies to be so transformed? I am not sure. Michaels was much more
familiar with the goals of the project and its overarching questions and purposes than
were his students. In addition, he was able to draw upon multiple experiences throughout
the city over many years facilitating the STP and similar projects. Michaels is also at a
very different stage in his life which raises questions about the readiness of young people
on the verge of graduation and complex transitions to adulthood to experience such a
feeling of belonging and being at home in Riverside. Whereas Michaels’ identity and
future is securely committed to Riverside, some students in this study hypothesized that
their futures would take them far beyond Riverside’s borders. Many young participants
described feeling anxious to “get out” of Riverside upon graduation.

Michaels’ personal experiences with the Second Tuesday Project are fascinating
and complex. They highlight the transformative potential of community-based
curriculum for all participants. My initial questions were related to students though, and
it is important to return to their experiences. Students’ teachers and their program
administrator described different aspects of the Second Tuesday Project experience that
were potentially influential to students. Patterson valued the project’s ability to raise
students’ awareness of social issues. Spillings emphasized the project’s message to
students about the importance of community involvement, the adult world of work, and
their potential roles as active citizens. Michaels stressed the importance of personal
experiences motivating students’ curiosity about community issues and problems. He
also highlighted the ways field experiences could become personally meaningful through
authentic discussions and real community work. It is clear that the adults involved with
the Second Tuesday Project witnessed many ways the project could and did contribute to students’ sense of self, community, and city.

Discussion
With evidence of varied, complex, and sometimes non-existent relationships between the Second Tuesday Project and participants’ geographies, it is important to look more closely at why these results were found. Most significant is the role of concrete and personal connections between prior knowledge, field experience, community issues and viable solutions. Also important is participants’ ability to make meaning out of their experiences, to contextualize their experiences in relevant ways - either through their own research and writing or with the help of teachers and mentors through thought-provoking curriculum.

Concrete Connections
Dana’s project altered her sense of place as well as her classmates’ because the relationships between neighborhood environments and crime she made were very concrete. Not only were students familiar with dilapidated buildings, dirty street corners, and poorly lit parking lots, they were also familiar with neighborhood crime and vandalism. Dana’s organizations linked these two phenomena and tried to improve neighborhood environments as a way of reducing crime. For Dana and her peers, this concrete relationship between litter and crime was insightful, relevant, and surprising. It made a great deal of sense to them and allowed students to interpret neighborhood environments differently, directly changing the way they see and understand neighborhood environmental and social conditions.
On the other hand, studies like Valerie’s were not as concrete. She researched issues of health care funding and conducted field work at a pediatrician’s office. Her time was spent helping out with paperwork, organizing bulletin boards, and reading pamphlets. She did not work directly with patients and was not privy to their personal financial situations that would demonstrate how they paid for visits. Her project was certainly not as concrete as Dana’s and did not have such a significant impact on her sense of place. Valerie’s experience was typical of many students in the class; Patterson described this sort of disconnect as frustrating for students who did not see much value to their work and could not connect it to relevant community solutions, “[students are] not going to save the hungry person, they are just going to stock the cans on the shelf. And they don’t like that; you know they want to be more involved.”

**Personal Connections**

Personal connections to issues or field experiences also helped make participation in the Second Tuesday Project meaningful. Michaels highlighted the importance of personal connections and Briana’s work was a good example. Listening to foster care case workers’ stories was transformative for her; she was moved by their challenges, inspired by their successes, and motivated to set her own career goals towards the social services because of these insights.

Swaminathan (2004) writes about the characteristics of a successful urban alternative high school program that integrated community study and involvement throughout its curricula. He explains that students “identified strongly with school for providing them with the opportunity to have meaningful experiences” (2004, p. 57). In the Second Tuesday Project, some students - by luck or by design (if they chose an
agency/topic that was already important to them) - managed to have meaningful experiences in the field. Others needed help making meaning from their field experiences. Many reported stocking shelves, filing papers or shucking boxes with frustration and boredom, lamenting the insignificance of their work. Though Michaels and Patterson tried to provide opportunities for students to reflect on their work in class with occasional follow-up questions when students reported on field days, there wasn’t a concerted or directed curricular effort to do this.

Elwood (2004) argues that when facilitating experiential learning, helping students make connections is essential, “Connecting students’ existing knowledge to new learning...is an important strategy through which experiential learning can foster critical thinking and enhance students’ understanding of the socio-political complexity of the spaces and places they explore in a field-based learning activity” (2004, p. 56). And Hogan (2002) explains that although community-based curricula enables “students to build identities as contributing members of a large community” in authentic contexts, they also present “the difficult pedagogical challenge of tailoring experiences to maximize student involvement and growth” (2002, p. 618). One of the reasons the Second Tuesday Project failed in some cases to impact young people’s geographies is that many students did not have reflective and critical curricular opportunities to help them make connections between social problems, field experiences, and community-based solutions.

I would argue that Michaels and Patterson’s insistence that students find issues that are interesting and meaningful at the outset of the project is not entirely necessary. Instead of taking time to place students with organizations students deem interesting,
teachers ought to focus on helping students find quality placements, understand their organization’s purpose, contextualize their field work’s significance, and identify the student’s and organization’s role addressing specific community problems. In fact, as Ball and Lai (2006) argue, many students will struggle to find any local community issue or context interesting. Thus, the challenge for place-based educators is to identify opportunities for meaningful and quality community involvement and, “sometimes temper their critical goals for students wherever they sense that merely fostering students' interest in and concern for place should be a priority” (Ball & Lai, 2006, p. 275). I believe educators can foster student interest and concern for place by ensuring that students are able to make connections between field work, their community, and broader social, economic, cultural and environmental issues.

Patterson described students’ resistance to local studies arguing that their geographies of Riverside were not well developed and students were reluctant to reconsider their assumptions:

In [students’] map of their world, their neighborhood is really their world. They don’t know Northside, they don’t know St. Charles, they know what they know - it will only be “They’re White, they’re rich, they’re spoiled,” or “They’re druggies too but they only think it’s us.” Students don’t really see that they could be a part of it.

I think she articulates here the central curricular challenge and opportunity the Second Tuesday Project provided faculty. How can curriculum help students broaden their horizons and support them in understanding their role as part of their community? How can curriculum, paired with students’ field experiences, help them expand their knowledge of familiar neighborhoods and develop a more complex understanding of
fellow citizens, community issues and real-world solutions? How can place- and community-based education help students “see that they could be a part of it?”

Participants’ whose Second Tuesday Project research influenced their geographies were able to clearly see the way their organization was addressing community issues and problems. Briana witnessed the importance of case workers advocating for foster children’s safety and welfare, Kayla-Jean endorsed the role of the Riverside Black Theater Company promoting positive African-American identities for youth, and Dana was encouraged by the work of the Urban League cleaning up neighborhood environments to reduce crime. On the other hand, Valerie never observed any connection between her medical clinic and families lacking comprehensive health care coverage. Adam’s critiques of the inadequacies of the youth job center where he volunteered only reinforced his belief that there were no jobs and no support for youth wanting to work in Riverside. When asked if his research changed his perspective of Riverside, he explained,

It actually showed me we are worse off. It’s like a lot of people come in [to the youth job center], 18 and older, who have already graduated and cannot find a job in the city…they went around to all the agencies and they still can’t find a job.

When students could not see a relationship between their research questions, their fieldwork, and viable solutions to community problems, their Second Tuesday Project participation was limited in its value.

At the intersection between students’ geographies of place and their participation in place-based education is a great deal of potential for engagement. Students bring to community studies rich experiences, interests and perspectives that can serve as motivators and building blocks for further study of place. Community-based education
offers numerous opportunities for direct engagement with community members, local agencies, and issues. It also offers opportunities for critical reflection of the social, political, and environmental structures shaping life in the community. Both are experiences that have enormous potential for transforming the way young people experience, perceive, and map their worlds.

But, when community-based curriculum fails to support students through quality field experiences and critical reflection connecting community involvement, local issues, and practical solutions, young people’s geographies and community-based education do not intersect at all. And classroom efforts to engage community contexts have little or no impact on the way young people envision and map their communities.

In cases where students made concrete or personal connections to their STP issues and field experiences, the project enriched and enhanced their understanding of Riverside communities. Providing these valuable learning opportunities to all students requires sensitivity to their geographies; curriculum must find ways to match or foster students’ interests and motivations in order to engage, challenge, and enrich their sense of place and community. Curriculum must also include a strong and clearly articulated theoretical foundation in place-based education so that educators, community members and students share an understanding of the purpose and meaning of their work.

Most importantly, I believe the students’ geographies from Chapter 4 demonstrate that community-based education does have the potential to be inspiring, engaging and transformative, enriching the way students understand their communities, cities and environments. But it is not quite as straightforward as just getting students out into the
community; this work requires adequate curricular support and facilitation. I will explore specific implications for community-based educators in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6 - Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the interactions between community-based education and children’s geographies. To do this, I used qualitative, participant-observation methods including classroom observations, focus groups and interviews with teachers, administrators and students participating in the Second Tuesday Project at Jefferson Center High School. My data analysis focused on three aspects of the phenomena: 1.) describing the successes and challenges of the Second Tuesday Project, 2.) exploring ways young people articulate their geographies of home, school, community and city, and 3.) examining how students’ participation in the Second Tuesday Project influenced their personal geographies and how their personal geographies contributed to their involvement with the Second Tuesday Project. In this chapter, I will review major findings from the study, describe the project’s implications for educators and significance for researchers, and explore its limitations, challenges, and directions for future inquiry.

Findings

The Second Tuesday Project

The Second Tuesday Project was a problem based, community-focused, research and service-learning project for 38 seniors enrolled in Jefferson Center’s Human Services Program. Students were assigned the task of identifying an interesting problem or issue in their community, volunteering with an organization dedicated to addressing that problem, and using their field experiences and additional research to write a research paper and present their findings. The purpose of the paper and presentation was to describe the problem’s history and presence in the community, contextualize students’ field experiences, and propose an action plan that would address the issue locally. In
practice, most students scrambled to find appropriate field placements and never clearly articulated their research questions. As a result, many students were unclear as to the relationships between community problems, their agency’s role in the community, the relevance of their field work, and the problems/issues they intended to study. Instead of making connections between community problems, solutions, and fieldwork, most presentations relied upon a general description of issues, summations of national campaigns related to those issues, and non-specific narratives (i.e. poetry and prayers) describing life’s challenges.

The few students who linked community-based problems and solutions with personal field experiences produced engaging and meaningful presentations on topics like foster care, relationships between neighborhood environmental and social conditions, and the importance of cultural identity in the African-American community. In these cases, students like Dana, Kayla-Jean and Briana deepened their geographies of Riverside based on the interconnectedness of communities, environments, and identities that they experienced and researched through the STP.

The lack of cohesion and clarity in students’ work was due in part to the lack of common language and shared purpose for the project. Aside from Michaels’ descriptions of the project in introductory handouts and interviews for this study, the overall purpose of the project was rarely referenced; I never heard faculty and students discussing daily work as part of a broad curricular plan. Beyond “getting students out in the community” and having them reflect, write, and research about their experiences, there was little shared understanding about the purpose, meaning, and relevance of the project – why it mattered, why it was worthwhile, and what skills or knowledge students should gain from
the experience. This led to many missed curricular opportunities like careful questioning and guided reflection that would have helped students contextualize their experiences in broader social, economic, political and environmental contexts.

Part of the reason for these missed opportunities was a lack of adequate planning. Both teachers facilitated the Second Tuesday Project in addition to their standard academic teaching schedules and responsibilities. As well, due to the way Riverside schools allocate funding and the way Jefferson Center organizes its programs, Michaels and Patterson were not able to plan curriculum before the school year started. The faculty’s struggles with planning, setting clear goals, working from a shared pedagogical theory, and garnering support from administration highlight the importance of the behind-the-scenes work required for educators interested in implementing community-based pedagogies in their classroom.

The Second Tuesday Project was very successful at removing barriers separating the classroom from the community. Because of the small school-within-a-school structure of the Human Services Program at Jefferson Center, teachers and students were able to utilize flexible scheduling strategies like changing the order and length of classes and combining classes in order to get students out into the community during the school day. The program also entrusted students with a great deal of responsibility by promoting their independent use of the city bus transit system to get to and from community field sites. Additionally, Michaels had amassed a wide network of community resources with whom he could collaborate when specific needs arose. For example, Michaels sent a small group of students downtown one morning to meet with a Department of Health and Human Services representative when students were struggling
to understand the details of government disability assistance and the welfare program.
The combination of program flexibility and student responsibility helped students and
teachers capitalize on learning opportunities in the community and dismantled traditional
barriers between school and the outside community.

Looking at the macro-political forces shaping community-based project, the
existence of the Second Tuesday Project within the Human Services Program requires
some consideration. Because of economic stressors due to school, district, and state
education funding issues, the former Paideia program shifted its focus to the Human
Services, a vocational/technical program. This shift to a career-based curriculum follows
national trends aimed at advancing education to meet work force needs which do not
necessarily match students’ more general education needs. Certainly this shift raises
questions about the overall purpose of education, especially in terms of its aims at
helping students understand the world around them. There is an innate bias in the Human
Services on the social contexts of the community, and an emphasis lost on the ecological,
historical, and political contexts that also shape human life in Riverside.

In addition, due to the vocational shift faculty’s new education focus assumed
students had an interest in the needs of fellow citizens; this was not necessarily the case
for this year’s Jefferson Center students who chose the Paideia Program as incoming 9th
graders, not the Human Services Program. In addition, the students in the program,
representative of students from throughout Jefferson Center, are some of the poorest and
most marginalized young people in Riverside, often the same people served by the
various social, economic, and health care organizations students investigated. These
complex connections raise questions about the social, cultural and economic dynamics of
responsibility in the human and social services career track, and the implications of tracking students whose families are often recipients of social service agencies into similar career trajectories. Michaels felt this overlap served to motivate students,

I would say by and large though the kids learn - are driven to learn more because of their circumstances, just to try to understand their world a little more - "Why did my father leave? Why does my father batter my mother? Why does my mother drink?" By finding out more about these issues, I think they are satisfying their own curiosity about their own set of circumstances.

To some degree I think this idea was supported by students like Kayla-Jean who was personally motivated to research her African-American identity through the STP. On the other hand, I think some students found issues the class explored like domestic violence and homelessness an imposition; they described growing “tired of homelessness” by the end of the unit. Teachers need to be extremely careful in their assumptions about what kinds of community issues resonate with young people. The assumption that the human services are meaningful to Jefferson Center students and that students will inherently relate to issues like domestic violence, hunger, and poverty can be interpreted as reproducing stereotypes of the African-American community as in need of significant development in those areas. Without a clear sense of purpose, these issues and assumptions are ambiguous through the Second Tuesday Project.

I would argue that findings from this curriculum study, especially students’ struggles with making relevant and meaningful connections between their field work, research, and local contexts is due in some part to issues raised by these macro-social, macro-political lenses. The Second Tuesday Project did not provide enough curricular time to explore and foster students’ interests in community issues. Teachers assumed that local community issues would resonate with students and they would find topics like
homelessness, domestic violence, and the social services inherently interesting. I would agree more with Ball and Lai (2006) who write:

Just because something is “local” (in the sense of being physically proximate) does not necessarily mean that it will always be particularly familiar or meaningful to students. Indeed, as a result of exactly the crisis for place and community that Theobald and other ecohumanists address in their work, many of today’s students are likely to find products of mass media, mass pop culture, and the Internet more familiar than whatever happens to be going on in their own backyard. Incorporation of local content into the curriculum does not in itself guarantee that a more effective frame for learning has been found. In fact, it begs the question of which local content, given the crisis of local communities and place, can provide such an effective frame (2006, p. 268).

Macro-political and social contexts situating the STP pose interesting questions for some of the issues teachers and students experienced in the program. For example, what political, economic, historic, ecological and social conditions have created the educational environment where inner-city schools must incorporate vocational/technical programs to receive sufficient funding? How do those conditions influence the ways young people and their schools incorporate community-based learning? Also, what do the career and vocational tracks chosen for a particular student population have to say about the dominant racial, cultural, social, ecological and economic ideologies shaping the lives and futures of young people? What happens when students resist those efforts, in this case by their lack of engagement, motivation or interest in their community-based projects? Finally, how can efforts in place- and community-based education better identify, foster, and develop students’ authentic interest and engagement with community and local contexts?
Participant Geographies

The eight students involved in this study offered complex and diverse perspectives of their homes, neighborhoods and cities. From Briana’s emphasis on crime and inclusion to Adam’s interests in technology and transit, students’ geographies illustrated the diversity of ways young people live, think about, and construct their worlds. Vanderbeck and Dunkley (2004) write that “Young people challenge and reproduce wider narratives of social difference and deconstruct their own local ‘otherings’, resulting in spaces that are comprised of differentiated and meaningful micro-territories where some young people feel comfortable and others do not belong” (2004, p. 182). Participants’ geographies in this study reflected these complex spatialities and revealed interesting trends related to race, class, inclusion, consumption and economic opportunity. Home was a complex and changing site, characterized by comfort and support but also conflict – especially as participants anticipated transitions post-graduation. School was a site marked by challenging peer norms, sometimes supportive student-faculty relationships, and physically restrictive facilities. Students viewed their city and neighborhoods in terms of segregation and violence, highlighting places where they felt marginalized or included - places that were inaccessible and others considered their own. Students described problematic relationships between consumptive space and their raced and classed identities. They were enthusiastic about places where they felt they could respectfully interact with diverse peers.

The relevance of Children’s Geographies for educators lies in its ability to map the worlds of young people and highlight children’s unique experiences, perceptions, and beliefs. Children’s Geographies argue that places matter and the spaces young people inhabit hold complex and often-changing meanings. Children’s Geographies suggest the
meaning young people attribute to places are windows into micro- and macro-political, social, economic, and environmental systems that are imposed upon, reproduced, and reconstructed by young people.

In terms of schooling, Children’s Geographies help us understand how schools can be complex and problematic environments for youth. Holloway and Valentine (2000) explain that “schools need to be thought of not as bounded spaces, but as porous ones produced through their webs of connections with wider societies which inform social-spatial practices within those spaces” (2000, p. 779). School facilities “speak” to students about the way society views and values them; the human relationships within school represent both personal and institutional relationships.

For place- and community-based educators who often focus on building community outside of school by fostering relationships beyond school walls, young people’s geographies remind educators that building positive communities within school also matters a great deal. Children’s Geographies map schools as places and environments that can be inclusive and supportive as well as marginalizing and exclusive. Students in this study described classrooms like Michaels’ as “fair” and “challenging – in a good way,” but described the institution of their school as prison-like.

Finally, young people’s descriptions of positive, empowering and safe places in their lives challenge educators to consider whether schools can be described similarly. In most cases in this study, students did not describe Jefferson Center as a positive, empowering or safe place. Instead, participants found recreation and consumptive sites outside school like Four Towers and the Banks as more inclusive, diverse, and welcoming then their school. As a site where young people spend so much of their lives,
it is well-worth reflecting on how educators can do better to create more supportive and positive environments at school.

Wridt (1999) argues on behalf of geography educators, but based on findings from this study, I would extend her argument to any educator working with young people:

…we should become more aware of how a child’s exposure to environments relates to the formation of mental images and conceptions of places. In particular, geographic educators should become attuned to the variety of social, cultural, and geographic backgrounds that shape a child’s everyday perspectives (1999, p. 254).

Children’s Geographies offer educators a critical spatial framework for understanding students lives both outside and inside of schools. This framework is a useful tool helping us understand who our students are, where they come from, how they see the world, and how we can better help them become knowledgeable, capable, and engaged citizens.

*Place and Spatial Frameworks*

This study was contextualized in ideas of place as a process – a fluid, multidimensional construct continually made and remade through personal, social, political, cultural and environmental experiences. For students in this study, the idea of Riverside was certainly a complex, contested, and multi-layered space which they were constantly reconstructing through social relationships, media sources, school experiences, and life in Riverside’s communities. Influenced by a complex and conflicted racial history of a Rust Belt industrial town, ideas of equality, opportunity, and fairness were a significant part of students’ geographies. Their notions of Riverside were also shaped by the city’s climate, topography, and their complex interpretations of the Middlesmith River as a political, ecological, social and cultural border.
Different from each other, different from myself and their teachers, students’ geographies of Riverside were “situated knowledges,” (Haraway, 1999, p. 178). They were views “from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring and structured body” (Haraway, 1999, p. 181). Kayla-Jean’s interpretations of the needs of the African-American teen community related directly to her own intimate process of self-identification. Briana’s maps of Riverside’s safe and dangerous places related directly to her physical experiences of violence in the city. Students experienced and interpreted place richly and deeply, as uniquely race, classed, and gendered individuals.

Using spatial frameworks to explore the geographies of students demonstrated that places matter a great deal to young people. In this case, issues like race, diversity, opportunity, safety and identity were of utmost importance in the way students interpreted and engaged with place in Riverside.

This study also demonstrated that spatial lenses and approaches can be pedagogical tools. As I learned in focus groups, questions like “Where do you go? What does that mean to you?” are great conversation starters and create valuable curricular opportunities for students to critically reflect on their political, social, ecological, economic and cultural environments. They foster the sort of reflection that can move students from micro-political perspectives to macro-political ones, transforming them, as Philo and Smith (2003) argue, into “political actors,” able to situate their experiences in broader social and political contexts (the exact transformations and cognitive movements many students missed in the Human Services classroom). In focus group sessions I found that spatial pedagogical tools like mapping and describing the meaning of places foster valuable discussions about place, identity, and meaning. I believe that utilizing
some of these approaches at the outset of classroom community-based projects and
curriculum could help teachers and students identify the type of local content students are
most interested in which can foster, as Ball and Lai (2006) suggest, “a more effective

*Children’s Geographies and Place-based Education*

This study demonstrated that the intersection between Children’s Geographies
and place-based education holds a great deal of potential for fostering learning
environments where children’s sense of place is transformed. But transformation
requires curriculum that engages students’ interest in place through meaningful
experiences and then situates community learning so that students feel connected and
empowered to work for positive change in their communities. It was clear that impacts of
the Second Tuesday Project on students’ geographies varied widely. Some participants
found the STP experience to be transformative, changing the way they viewed their city,
community, and themselves. Dana came away with a more “realistic” view of her city,
Kayla-Jean developed a richer understanding of African-American teens’ identity
struggles, and Briana’s research inspired her to study social work in college. For other
students, the project was a waste of time, boring and unrelated to their lives and futures.
Candace found tutoring third graders unrelated to community life and Charity described
the project as “just like skipping school.” The key factor influencing these results was
the students’ ability to find relevance in their work and connect it to broader social issues,
community problems, and real-world, meaningful solutions. To make this connection,
students needed well-constructed research questions, relevant use of field and literature-
based resources, and the opportunity to discuss and contextualize issues with teachers and classmates in productive ways.

Fine et. al. (2004) write “[schools are] are intimate places where youths construct identities, build a sense of self, read how society views them, develop the capacity to sustain relations and forge the skills to initiate change" (2004, p. 2199). Findings from participants’ geographies indicate that, like Fine et. al. suggest, students at Jefferson Center were constructing identities, building a sense of self, and reading how society views them through their school experiences. But the Second Tuesday Project fell short in its ability to develop in students the skills to initiate change. Though most students were able to discuss social and environmental problems in their research, very few recommended or reflected upon authentic community contexts or solutions. Without a strong community-based pedagogy, the project lacked the ability to transform a majority of students’ geographies.

For community-based educators, this study underscores the importance of developing and sharing a clear sense of purpose for community and place-based curricula prior to starting and throughout the implementation of a project. It also emphasizes the need for flexible approaches to scheduling, transportation, and appropriate use of student time. Case studies of students’ geographies highlight the importance of place in young people’s lives and challenge educators to develop communities both in and outside of school that are diverse, inclusive, safe, and empowering. Though there are many ways community-based projects interact with young people’s geographies, findings from this study demonstrate that the potential for transformative, engaging, participatory education is very real through community-based education. Community-based education certainly
can contribute to young people’s perceptions of themselves, their community, their city, and their place in the world; with a careful, clear, and locally grounded approach, it can do this more consistently.

Limitations and Future Studies
Every study is limited in its scope and implications, this one is no different. In this section, I will examine issues related to teacher and student participation in the project and my role as a researcher. I will also look at gaps in this study which indicate directions for future research.

Teacher and Student Participation
Participation by faculty and students in this study was not without its complications. My interest and interactions with participants over the course of the year influenced their perceptions of and experiences with the Second Tuesday Project. For faculty, interviews provided an opportunity for reflection; as our discussions were often theoretically grounded (I was interested in the underlying goals, purposes and contexts of the STP) their consideration of these frameworks grew. For students, focus group sessions and interviews were opportunities for them to reflect on their Second Tuesday Project; these discussions also seemed to increase the understandings and insights they gained from the project. As well, I believe my relationship with students as a White researcher had implications on the study’s findings, especially in terms of the value students placed on diverse, culturally and racially inclusive sites like Four Towers, the Banks, and extracurricular school activities (student government, summer academic programs). I will explore these and other issues in detail in the following sections.
Teachers and the research process.

As I interviewed both Patterson and Michaels about their experiences with the Second Tuesday Project, I asked questions regarding their pedagogical theories: their goals for student participation and outcomes, why they embraced the program, and why they found the project meaningful and relevant. These discussions changed over the course of the year suggesting that my presence impacted the way faculty reflected upon their teaching. Initially resolute that they had no curriculum, by the end of the year teachers were critically reviewing their curriculum and planning ahead to the following year’s curricular goals.

As an outsider to classroom practice enmeshed in theoretical questions and orientations, I felt early on that my interactions with faculty demonstrated the void that sometimes exists between education theory and practice. I introduced my work and research questions at faculty meetings by describing spatial frameworks, community-based theories, and research methods from Children’s Geographies. Teachers’ response would be something like, “We don’t do that here,” or, “We have no curriculum for that.” I explained my interest in students’ geographies and teachers’ integration of community contexts and faculty would listen politely, lament their lack of planning, condemn their unsupportive administration, and explain that there just wasn’t time to organize that kind of curriculum. Minutes later, a narrative from the classroom would refute that claim.

On one occasion at a Human Services faculty meeting, Patterson explained that she had not planned curriculum focusing directly on community or place and wasn’t really working at a theoretical level, she was just going along with the STP because it would help with the students’ research paper requirement. A short while later, Patterson described to myself and her colleagues the success of her Graffiti Wall as a “last minute
stroke of inspiration” – an activity that engaged and excited students. To me, the Graffiti Wall made a lot of theoretical sense as a way of inviting students to reflect on community issues, explore their own interests, and address potential areas where they could be part of positive community change. But Patterson didn’t see it that way. Primarily concerned with the challenge of filling an empty 50-minute instructional period, she approached the task from a more practical perspective. The activity engaged students and absorbed almost three otherwise unplanned bell periods. Instances like these demonstrated clearly to me that my approach was far too theoretical to be relevant to teachers and their approach was far too practical to be applicable to my questions.

It took many more conversations and classroom interactions in order for faculty and me to discuss their teaching and my research in overlapping terms, integrating ideas and experiences from both theoretical and practical perspectives. I had to reconnect my theoretical questions to more concrete classroom realities and faculty began to use our interactions to reflect on the big ideas behind their teaching.

To do this, I started sharing with teachers how my theoretical questions about students’ sense of place manifested into practical activities during focus group sessions. I began asking more explicit questions about things I had seen in the classroom, like the meaning Patterson felt students made from the Graffiti Wall activity and how specific students were interpreting their STP fieldwork. After more discussions like these linking my theoretical questions to specific classroom practices, Patterson reflected differently on her and Michaels’ process of curricular planning. Instead of saying, “We don’t have curriculum” she considered the gap more theoretically, as a lack of knowledge about
where the curriculum was headed. In considering how things might be different in upcoming years she explained,

The newspaper clips I had gathered over the summer, they were interesting but they could have been more coherent – in the future I’ll have more than three little blurbs…and use the language that you are using, focusing on students’ “map of the community” how do they see it - even doing visuals with maps. We will have it [those activities] from the beginning because we will know where we are going…But we didn’t develop a language, we really didn’t know quite where we were going.

It is possible Patterson was simply trying to appease me by using similar language (“map,” “community”) that I was using describing my interests and practices through focus group sessions. It is also possible that I had simply pestered Patterson enough that she understood the types of answers I was looking for. On the other hand, it is possible that my presence and interest in the theoretical underpinnings of the STP provided her a reflective and insightful opportunity to consider her practice and we had finally been able to bridge the gap between my theoretical questions and her classroom practices. I wonder if Patterson’s and Spillings’s reflections that the Human Services faculty needed to “sit down to discuss” curricular goals and practices in order to develop a “common language” (as Patterson termed it) would have come up without my presence asking questions about curricular goals and practices.

Through our discussions about guiding theories and big ideas directing the STP curriculum, I believe teacher participants began to reflect upon and value the role of theory in their teaching practice. When they realized they had done little planning in theoretical areas, they consequently spoke to the need for curricular development and establishing a “common language.” I think the combination of my presence and inquiry and their own experiences and observations of students struggling with the STP resulted
in teachers’ insightful reflections on the relationship between theory, planning, and practice. I believe the insights teachers gained through our discussions underscore educators’ need for professional space and time for focused, reflective discussions about their pedagogical theories and classroom practices.

As I began to finalize drafts of this paper, I sent drafts to participating students and teachers. Aside from updates of their lives, schooling and work, the only response I received regarding the actual research came from Michaels. We met up a year after I left his classroom and talked briefly about this paper and the research process. His response to this paper was that the findings were “hard to hear, but right on.” He explained that findings were accurate, just difficult to read because they highlighted shortcomings in his teaching and practice. I was concerned that my descriptions of his classroom were somehow unfair and highlighted only negative aspects of the STP, offending and misrepresenting participants. Michaels assured me that this was not the case, but that it can simply be difficult to hear about aspects of your teaching that need improvement. Michaels remained positive about the research process and findings and was enthusiastic to hear updates I could pass on from his former students.

*Students and the research process.*

For students, the focus group sessions and interviews also provided an opportunity for critical reflection on their lives and learning. As mentioned earlier, students were able to critically reflect upon micro- and macro-political structures through our dialogue and activities, providing opportunities for them to develop their “political selves” (Philo & Smith, 2003, p. 103). It seemed that the value of the Second Tuesday Project increased for participants the more we discussed the project in focus group
sessions and interviews. Students were able to reflect on their experiences in association with each other and broader social, racial, and economic contexts.

Students also valued their participation in focus group sessions. Summarizing her experience with the research process, Briana explained,

I've always only had my view, so it was interesting to get an opportunity to hear what my peers had to say about the community that we live in - like this is what we have, this is what we've shared most of our lives...it was eye-opening to be able to sit down and say, “this is what I think and this is why I think it.” To have somebody say “well, look at this side of this and this is why I think what I think,” was definitely a good opportunity.

Students valued the opportunity to reflect on their lives, experiences, and participation in the Second Tuesday Project. These findings also point to the importance of time and space for students to reflect upon and share their insights about the processes of living and learning.

An important dimension of this study was my role as a White researcher with Black students. I asked the students about our racial differences and their responses were positive, suggesting our differences were not influential. Candace argued that my Whiteness, “didn't affect me, I don't see the difference, I've been exposed to and worked with people from other races all my life - you are just another person working on a research project and we are just here helping you out.” Dana explained that my presence was possibly problematic “to other people,” but “not to me… you are White, you are just another person - my step dad is White, I work with a lot of White people - you are just a different person.” Adam used the question to assert his understanding that race doesn’t necessarily equate with economic status; when I asked if my presence as a White researcher impacted them, he responded, “not really, I have a lot of friends that are White
- and some of them are worse off than any Black person I know.” Kayla-Jean argued that there was no distinction because of a different association – that I was “urban.” “I don't look at you like you are White, you are urban to me, you are Black in my eyes - I can talk to you …seriously that's how I look at you.” My relationship with the students throughout the project was very positive, jovial, and kind. They were accepting of me from the beginning of the project, likely because of my warm welcome from Michaels, a well-respected teacher, and possibly due to a respectful rapport built during my early community-based research mini-workshops.

Though their comments are reassuring, I think my role as a White researcher was much more complex. I wonder to what extent students’ descriptions of the free and neutral territories of the Banks and Four Towers were shaped by my presence. When Briana affirmed that she loved the Banks because she could take her “real deal” White girl friends there from Maple Valley High School, she was talking about girls like me. When I introduced myself at our first focus group session and when Michaels introduced me to the students initially in class, the fact that I graduated from Maple Valley was mentioned. Though it could have gone unnoticed, from my experience growing up in Riverside, I doubt it. In Riverside, one’s high school is a clear indicator of one’s social, economic, and cultural background; introducing yourself to someone and declaring your alma mater provides a significant amount of information (true or otherwise) about your socio-economic and cultural identity. I wonder to what extent the multicultural and diversity-favoring identity students portrayed through their positive descriptions of the Banks, Four Towers, and their experiences with student government and summer
academic programs was related to a sense that I would approve of those sorts of places and meanings.

Students knew that I attended Maple Valley High School and grew up in Lincoln Heights – the same diverse neighborhood Briana described as dangerous and volatile. They also knew that I had chosen to conduct my dissertation research at an almost all-Black high school. It is likely assumptions were made about my comfort with multicultural learning communities and interest in diversity. Difficult to tease apart, it is worth noting the connection, the problematic nature of my geographic identity, and the potential way my role as a White researcher from Riverside interacted in the social construction of participants’ geographies. Though I don’t deny students valued places in their lives that offered safe, diverse environments, I wonder how those places compare to other safe, predominantly African-American places in students’ lives that they were less likely to share with me.

In addition, because my interactions with students were limited to observations, interviews and focus group sessions at school, their discourse around me remained somewhat formal and academic. It was pretty typical of students in our group discussions to use fairly formal “rules” of discussion that they had become accustomed to in their three years of Paideia training which emphasized discussion-based seminars. For example, at one point in a focus group session, Adam disagreed with one of Dana’s descriptions of the city and her response to his interruption was, “Well, Adam, I am just making a point… if you want to let me finish and make your counterpoint then go ahead.” It was clear to me that students were comfortable discussing issues formally in a small group.
I consider students’ participation in our discussions as “formal” because they often suggested that among their peers, their language use was different. For example, Charity explains, “This whole school is the same, it’s a fashion show, everybody’s talking about what they got on – this school is boring, everybody wants to be just like everybody else, “Why you got them shoes on? You supposed to wear jewelry just like everybody else!” Note here the informal tone and language use Charity’s describes her peers using, different from the tone and language she used in our discussions and interviews. Discursive issues like these suggest that my interactions with students were framed significantly by the formality of school. And because I did not journey outside of school with students, their actions, contributions, reflections and participation as part of this study were still shaped in some way by the political, cultural, social, and economic structures of schooling.

**Looking Ahead**

This project left many questions unanswered and created many more. I remain moved and curious about Michaels’ geographic transformation through his facilitation of the Second Tuesday Project. An interesting avenue for future research would be to explore the geographies of educators teaching about community and civic participation. Clearly, it would be worthwhile to explore other community-based programs to understand how teachers in different school and community contexts grapple with curricular development and how they negotiate the logistics of traditional schooling in order to integrate community contexts into their students’ educational experiences.

An important component of this study that I did not explore critically was the concept of community and the role of community partners in the STP. Although I
explored the history and multiple dimensions of place I wanted to investigate through this study, I failed to apply an equal lens to the concepts and dimensions of community that informed this study as well. In addition, my participant-observation was limited to the Jefferson Center classroom and I did not venture into the community with students to observe them at their field sites, interview participating agencies, and describe the role and participation of agencies and mentors more clearly.

A complex term with many meanings, I failed to examine with students and teachers their definitions of community and the assumptions they made when we used the term (as we did frequently). The concept of community would have been important for me to understand in order to more fully grasp the goals and understandings of teachers and students. Grappling with the definition of community would also be a very useful pedagogical tool for community-based educators in order to illuminate and construct a concept of community that resonated for students, their teachers, and their sense of place. Clearly, the concept of community both in research and practice needs more investigation in order to understand its meaning for students and educators more completely.

The field of Children’s Geographies is dedicated to studying the social, political, economic, environmental and geographic worlds of young people; it provided a unique and perceptive lens for this study but there remains a wealth of methodologies, insights, and challenges from the field that would prove applicable and relevant for educators. As an educator, I would love to explore the use of spatial frameworks as classroom pedagogical tools further. Long after participating students had graduated, I realized I missed a very obvious and informative activity when I failed to examine large street and neighborhood maps of Riverside with students allowing them to interpret the maps, draw
their own borders, and highlight important places. Still, I was impressed at the ways the activities I did use inspired reflective and critical dialogue. It would be exciting to find ways to integrate these spatial, geographic activities into more traditional classroom settings.

Each time I return to my data from this study I lament the follow up questions I missed, the opportunities for clarifying statements I failed to capture, and the glaring gaps in the stories, perceptions, and experiences I collected. It would be very exciting to return to these research questions again in different times and places, with different students, programs and contexts. I believe they are relevant questions: as place- and community-based educators, are we doing the transformative work we think we can? What are we missing? How can we be more effective? As researchers looking for better ways to understand the social, cultural, ecological and political lives of students, how can we draw upon the tools of Children’s Geographies to better know our students and their worlds? These seem to me very proactive questions, searching for answers that will allow educators to move forward with enhanced clarity and a stronger sense of purpose.

This study has highlighted some of the challenges and successes of teachers and students grappling with place-conscious curriculum in the classroom. It has emphasized the importance of recognizing that place is a fluid, complex, and contradictory concept, and place is constantly being reconstructed by those experiencing it. Thus, it is important for educators to recognize that young people’s sense of place is a rich, multilayered and highly meaningful construct, and we cannot impart our own ideas of place through curriculum without resistance. Instead, we must develop an understanding of how students have imagined place prior to embarking on the very collaborative process of
In this study, I tried to do many things: study the life of community-based education in a real classroom, explore young people’s geographies for the purpose of improving educational practices, and examine the ways community-based curriculum influenced young people’s sense of place. My findings highlight the need for thoughtful, theoretically grounded, community-based curricular efforts and sensitive teaching that integrates and challenges young people’s geographies. The study suggests the pedagogical potential of Children’s Geographies methods, spatial frameworks, and insights for doing this transformative work. This study also tells a very small piece of the stories of eight dynamic young people and two committed teachers who offered their experiences, perspectives, and voices to this project.

One of my earliest questions in this study was to explore the intersection between place-based education and Children’s Geographies and try to articulate what the interaction tells us about our students, our curriculum, and our communities. For our students, this study has demonstrated that their lives and experiences in communities,
neighborhoods, and cities create dynamic and complex geographies. In terms of curriculum, it is clear that curriculum on place and community does not always resonate with young people’s sense of place and needs to examine more closely which dimensions of place matter to students. In terms of our communities, I believe that if we do not engage students in understanding, studying and creating places in our communities, we run the risk of losing them. I think of students like Candace who is disengaged from her community and disappointed by what she sees as a lack of opportunity and racial fairness. She imagines her future elsewhere, not in Riverside. I worry that if we don’t find a way for students to participate positively in their communities they will decide that those communities are simply not worth their time, effort, or futures. On the other hand, if we can create learning environments where students’ interests are fostered by authentic research into their communities and their selves, they might envision themselves as Kayla-Jean did, ready to dig in, learn more, “pop out” of her bubble, and become an active and positive part of creating the community she imagines. The future of education needs critical community-based programs and educators; it also needs engaging frameworks and disciplines like Children’s Geographies to help us listen to and understand our students, their needs, and their worlds more completely.
Epilogue - Going Home

It seems to me that as researchers studying children, we are the ones who are often looked at, gazed at and inspected. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes us conscious of ourselves, leading to our need to turn this gaze around and look at ourselves (Aitken, 2001, p. 183).

From 2005-2008, my family went through two significant transitions. We started in Albuquerque, New Mexico where I was a high school science teacher at a small, rural, and very diverse school and moved to Anchorage, Alaska where my husband could begin his medical residency in Family Medicine. During this time, I was beginning the initial research and planning for my dissertation project on young people’s geographies and place-based education. I had imagined my research with students in New Mexico; after ten years living in Albuquerque I felt I had a good sense of my students’ geographies and though I would be challenged by their individual cultural contexts and experiences, I would have some familiarity with the landscapes of their world. I quickly shifted research sites and began considering the geographies of Alaskan students, even further from my own experience, completely foreign but still very interesting and relevant. I planned to examine how ideologies of Alaska were reproduced through schooling and how children constructed their sense of place in context with those ideologies. Over the course of that first autumn in Anchorage as we were beginning to fall in love with the landscapes, people, and communities of Alaska, my husband realized he needed to change specialties, a disheartening but honest revelation that caused him to quickly
identify a different clinical focus and residency program. I also had to scramble, needing to rapidly find a site for my research as my proposal deadline was nearing and I now had no home for my study. Uncertain as to our next move, I chose to locate my study in Riverside, knowing that no matter where my family ended up, I had school contacts in Riverside and importantly, the logistical support of my parents to rely on for childcare and a home base. My husband ended up taking a position in the Midwest and we currently call southeastern Minnesota home. But for the last two years, Riverside has become my “office” and my children’s home-away-from-home.

My parents left our childhood home in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood of Riverside when my younger sisters left for college, moving two miles away to a more private house in the woods (albeit Riverside woods - you can still hear ambulances, trains, and plenty of road traffic even if you can’t see it). The drive from the airport to their house takes you directly through Lincoln Heights, so it still feels like the old neighborhood. Throughout my research and a good part of my writing year, I hauled my two small children to my parents’ house in the woods and Grandma and Grandpa would look after the children during my long and irregular hours at Jefferson Center. It had been almost 14 years since I left Riverside. In many ways, this research project meant I was going home - to familiar people, neighborhoods and schools. But instead of the typical weekend holiday visits, my involvement with the Jefferson Center High School community placed me more richly into the contours of Riverside. The process challenged and reconstructed my geography of Riverside and my understanding of home.

To drive from my parents’ house to Jefferson Center, I first follow the route I took for six years to get from my home to my high school, Maple Valley. I pass familiar
places: the home of children I babysat throughout my teens, the street where my best
friend lived, and the highway exit that takes you to my grandmother’s old house – where
my mother grew up. I stay on the highway to the following exit though, driving past my
childhood doctor’s office, dentist’s office, and the office where my father worked. Three
blocks from Jefferson Center is a row of old brick townhouses where my older sister and
I rented a hot and humid fourth floor apartment one summer; we were home from college
and wanted to live in a more urban and lively part of town than our Lincoln Heights
neighborhood.

When I finally arrived at Jefferson Center, I found the students’ Riverside was
similar to mine but also very different. Most of the places they mentioned - the malls,
downtown, Four Towers - were places I also hung out as a teenager and was familiar
with. Others, like the Banks, were part of new construction from the last 10-15 years -
I’d only visited them as a tourist. Importantly, the meanings of the places my participants
described were different. The marginalization they felt because of the color of their skin
as teens in Riverside was a dimension entirely unknown to me. As a privileged White,
middle-class teenager, I experienced Riverside quite differently than they did. My view
was from the front seat of the banged up 1986 Chevy Celebrity my parents passed down
so I could help shuttle myself and my sisters to school, sports, work, and to the trails of
my favorite city parks (many not on the bus line) where I had grown up playing in creeks,
hiking with our dog, and sitting with my journal scribbling away through my
adolescence. I babysat neighbors’ kids, worked at a frozen yogurt shop, and was a
summer camp counselor - all jobs easily found through my neighborhood community, my
parents’ friends, or my own scuttling around town dropping off resumes in my big blue Chevy.

Growing up and even as an adult, my geography of Riverside was framed by the city’s ecological and environmental contexts. I was familiar with the plight of Riverside’s native plants and animals because I’d helped my parents remove invasive plants in their gardens and had noticed it was getting a lot tougher to find salamanders in my favorite creek due to increased upstream construction and pollution. I knew the best hiking trails in all of Riverside’s city parks, lamented the city’s lack of “real” wilderness areas (having moved west, I was now accustomed to vast expanses of open wildlands), but I still enjoyed canoeing local rivers and bird watching at winter feeders. When I brought my children to Riverside for visits, we hiked at the Riverside Nature Center, toured the Natural History Museum, and explored the creek beds and forests at my parents’ house.

The students I was working with framed the city more in terms of its socio-economic and racial contexts. Theirs was a city stratified racially and economically. It was full of tension; every place they visited was one where they could potentially be marginalized, ostracized, or treated unfairly. At their school in the bustling, urban, university area, we talked about race, neighborhood violence, and metropolitan bus routes. We talked about urban development in their “ghetto” neighborhoods and the unfair city practices of school funding, zoo funding, and real estate development.

My students’ socio-economic consciousness of Riverside began reshaping my own geography of the city. I returned from Jefferson Center to my parents’ house in the woods and transcribed interviews surrounded by the sights and sounds of their hillside
home: a thick green deciduous forest canopy, dozens of birds and deer, my mother’s wild
garden (hard to tell its borders from the surrounding forest) and my children playing in
the woods with Grandma and Grandpa. In the midst of such green, I transcribed Briana’s
narratives of her brother’s struggles with drug dealers in Lincoln Heights, Candace’s
stories about being targeted for teen curfews because she was Black, and Kayla-Jean’s
accounts of hanging out at the downtown library and Southwood bingo hall. I would
transcribe for a while, reflect for a while, write for a while, then go outside to sit on a
mossy, wet stump in the woods and talk through my analysis of Adam’s urban geography
including the complex bus fare system, his intricate knowledge of Riverside’s
neighborhoods, townships, and villages and his love of Internet gaming communities.
My son Henry would chatter on about sticks and ants or fossils and walnut seeds and I
would half-listen to him, half-try to make sense of Adam’s bus-route geography by
simultaneously discussing both issues (Adam’s bus routes and Henry’s fossils) with my
patient children and even more patient parents. My map of Riverside was changing.

Gruenewald (2008) urges critical educators to work from a socioecological
perspective; my work at Jefferson Center and the students there helped me diversify my
predominantly ecological geography of Riverside with a heightened sensitivity to its
social geography. They deepened my understanding of the racial and social
stratifications of the city’s neighborhoods and the implications of those differences on
their lives. They heightened my awareness of violence, racial tension, and urban
development. And the students helped me value diverse sights like Four Towers and the
Banks in a different way than I had before.
I’ve noticed that I visit Riverside differently now. I go to grocery stores where Jefferson Center students work, hoping to run into familiar faces. I spend more time at businesses in the university neighborhood and pay more attention to issues of race and diversity in Riverside news. I still take my children exploring in the local creeks and woods when I’m in town but I’m also taking them to cultural events at the Underground Railroad Museum or those presented by the Riverside Black Theater Company.

The students and teachers at Jefferson Center and their perspectives and experiences of life in the city have transformed the way I map and interpret Riverside. My interactions with them and working through these questions of place, schooling, and world view have been positive and inspiring experiences. For all their struggles and challenges, the teachers at Jefferson Center are working very hard to provide meaningful opportunities for their students. They believe strongly in their work and even more in the capabilities of their students. And the students are impressive. Bright, engaging, critical and reflective, they were the heart of this work. I remain humbled by their participation and insights. I hope their contributions and these findings will somehow improve the process of education for them in the future and for their children. Their participation has certainly changed my sense of place and continuing education.

Aitken writes, “some of my fascination with young people may be simply a device to hold on to a seemingly unchanging certainty - such as the innocence of childhood - somewhere outside my own "fake" experiences” (Aitken, 2001, p. 183). This work has caused me to reflect a great deal on my own childhood and especially my adolescence in Riverside. Unlike Aitken’s work with children, this project has complicated the innocence with which I remembered Riverside. The complications are
richer though - as Dana put it, I have a “more knowledgeable” and “realistic” view of my hometown. I remember being 18, making very deliberate and headstrong college plans to go west and prove that I could make choices about where to live better than my parents. This project has shown me the richness of the choice my parents made for my sisters and I; it has made me consider more deeply the choices I’m making for my children.

Importantly, I’ve learned that it is through trying to understand a place, trying to make sense of how we and others see it, that we grow ever more connected to it. The richness we find in a place is closely related to the depth of our questions, the quality of our “research,” the detail in our maps, and the ways we relate to the people, the history, the stories and the land that make it whole.
Appendix A – Workshop Lesson Plans

Asking good questions: lesson outline

Lesson Objectives: Students will categorize and write different types of research questions. They will complete a research question planner from which they will construct a list of interview questions for their first interview with community agencies.

Introduction
Objectives: Introduce to students the importance of good questioning in research and different types of questions. Offer relevant examples.
*teacher-directed, lecture/discussion

1. Good research starts with good questions – in order to conduct quality research you need to have a good list of questions
2. Good questions come from a variety of sources – you may develop questions based on personal experiences, observations, external sources (i.e. newspaper articles, web pages, music, TV, radio). It helps to know why you are interested in something; it can lead to better questions!
   Ex: Walking down the street you notice big crowds around the soup kitchen/free store. You wonder, “How did those people get there? Why aren’t they working? What do they do when they aren’t at the soup kitchen?”
3. Questions change over time – the more you learn about an issue/topic, the more specific (or sometimes general) the questions can become. Be open to this!
   Ex: After interviewing people at the soup kitchen about why they are there, not working real jobs, you learn that some of them are disabled. You begin to wonder, “what resources are out there for the poor and disabled? How do people find these agencies?”
4. There are many types of questions:
   A. Broad research questions: are often broad and cover big ideas: “What resources are there in Riverside for poor and disabled members of the community?”
   B. Research subquestions: are more specific: “Where are these resources located? How do people find them? What do they actually do? How are they funded? Why are they or aren’t they working?”
   C. Interview questions: are very specific, directed towards particular people who may know particular pieces of information: For the director of a soup kitchen you may ask, “How many people that come here are disabled?” “What other resources are out there for your disabled guests?”
   D. Quantitative vs. Qualitative questions – all questions can be either qualitative or quantitative. It depends on the type of information they are asking.
      1. Quantitative questions are closed, they tend to give a specific answer in numbers, specific data, or yes/no. Often, “Who, what, where” questions. “How many people that come here are disabled?” “What other resources are out there for your disabled guests?”
      2. Qualitative questions are open ended and tend to describe, explain, or detail something. Often “How, Why” questions. “How is your organization meeting the needs of the homeless and disabled?”
Activity: “20 Questions”
Objective: Allow students to practice writing, organizing and thinking about questions with a partner and a shared topic/issue.
1. In pairs, students pick a topic from a list on board chosen by teacher (i.e. poverty in Riverside, drug abuse among Riverside teens, pollution in urban areas, Riverside police/public relations…) and each student writes the topic as a heading on their own blank sheet of paper. (This does not have to be “their topic” for their research project; this is just practicing with writing and categorizing questions).
2. Individually, students are given 5-10 minutes to brainstorm as many questions about that topic they can think of, shoot for 10-20 questions (or give a specific required number)— students do this work alone. Emphasize that questions do not have to be “good” – any question will do for now, it is a brainstorm.
3. When finished, the two students share questions and work together to “CODE” their questions - these code symbols could be anything – you could use different color markers, highlighters, or just write what sort of question it is after each… one example would be...
   a. Each quantitative questions gets a # sign, qualitative gets a * (all questions should be marked as either quantitative or qualitative)
   b. Big ideas, broad research questions get an !
   c. Research subquestions get a check mark
   d. Interview questions get a ?
4. Share with class – time permitting, have groups share examples of their questions with group i.e. One broad question, one subquestion, one interview question and explain if each is a qualitative or quantitative question. If there is room, they could write one of each on board.
5. Discussion questions:
   a. Do broad research questions tend to be qualitative or quantitative? Why?
   b. How are interview questions different than research questions and subquestions? How are they similar?

Activity: Research question planner
Objective: Help students organize their thinking and questioning and make the transition from big research questions and ideas to related interview questions for specific community members.
1. Hand out planner worksheets (see attached) and explain each column, remind students that this is a worksheet, an organizer to help them think and plan – it may end up being a little messy!
2. Have students work individually on planners and, time permitting, share with partner to see if partner can help brainstorm questions around that topic as well.
### Research questions planner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Identify Issues and Interests</th>
<th>2. Identify central issue/interest and brainstorm questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>brainstorm topics of interest/concern in your community (think about your graffiti wall issues) and list them here:</em></td>
<td><em>select one issue or interest from the first column that will be your research focus – list here:</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Why are you interested in these topics? What personal experiences, observations, or external sources (media) have you seen that make this an interesting issue?</em></td>
<td>Brainstorm of questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>brainstorm a list of questions you have about this issue in your community:</em></td>
<td><em>brainstorm a list of questions you have about this issue in your community:</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Organize and further develop your questions about that issue.

*list here your BROAD RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 4. Develop interview questions from research questions

*identify a community member you will interview for this project, describe their position/job/role here:

*Make a list of specific questions you will ask this person that help you answer the broad research questions and subquestions you listed in column 3.

*list here your RESEARCH SUBQUESTIONS
Appendix B – Student Mapping Samples

Dana’s Map
Briana’s Map
Appendix C – Riverside Brochure Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Front)</th>
<th>(Back)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Riverside... the real deal</td>
<td>Places to Go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Scenery (what it looks like)</td>
<td>Sources (How do you know all this about Riverside?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Inside)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The People</td>
<td>The Land and Natural Environment</td>
<td>Social Conditions (race relations, poverty, housing, social services, violence, drugs...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Riverside Teenager Experience</td>
<td>Riverside Neighborhoods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


