Connecting with Communities: Researching a Community-University Partnership in Teacher Education

by

Sarah O’Sullivan

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Higher Learning and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Sarah O’Sullivan 2018
Connecting with Communities: Researching a Community-University Partnership in Teacher Education

Sarah O'Sullivan
Doctor of Philosophy
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
2018

Abstract

While there exists a substantial body of literature on community-university partnerships, there is a notable absence of community perspective in the literature. The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences and perspectives of community members involved in a university–community partnership that developed a social justice and alternative placement program for Bachelor of Education students enrolled at a Southern Ontario University. Despite being formed with the best of intentions, authentic university-community partnerships are complex entities and are often very difficult to achieve. This study looks at the important benefits as well as significant challenges for the community partners, and how the complexity of the university-community partnership grows with the numbers of partners involved (multiple community partners in the case of my research). The experiences of the community partners are expressed through the interviews I conducted with participants. In my study, as in the case of many practitioner research studies, uncovering important knowledge about social and political issues starts from the local (community partner) perspective. This research study is meant to be a possible guide for those who wish to undertake similar work. It is my intention that the research
study and findings will add insights to the theoretical and conceptual discourse on practitioner research and add to the literature reflecting community perspectives within these partnerships.
My deepest appreciation and gratitude goes to my thesis supervisor Dr. Tara Goldstein, without whom I would never had finished. Many thanks to Dr. Rob Simon and Dr. Jamie Magnusson who stuck with me, despite many bumps along the way.

I am eternally grateful for the love and support of my family that saw me through this unbelievably long process. Thank you!
Table of Contents

Abstract.................................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... iv
Table of Contents .................................................................................................................................... v
Table of Figures ....................................................................................................................................... ix
Appendices ............................................................................................................................................... x

Chapter 1: Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

Aims and Purpose of the Study.............................................................................................................. 1
Evolution of the Research Study .......................................................................................................... 2
Context: Locating the Research ........................................................................................................... 3
The Research Problem .......................................................................................................................... 8
Doing a Critical Practitioner Research Study ......................................................................................... 9
Overview of the Chapters ..................................................................................................................... 10


Community Education ......................................................................................................................... 13
Community-university partnerships ..................................................................................................... 18
Social Justice Education ....................................................................................................................... 21
Critical Pedagogy ................................................................................................................................. 28

Chapter Three: Methodology .............................................................................................................. 35

Practitioner Research .......................................................................................................................... 36
Mapping the Field ................................................................................................................................. 39
Action Research ........................................................................................................ 39
Teacher Research .................................................................................................. 39
Self-Study. ............................................................................................................. 39
Using Teaching as Site for Research. ................................................................... 40
Reflective Practice. ............................................................................................... 40
Narrative Inquiry ................................................................................................ 40
Practitioner Research .......................................................................................... 41
Critiques ................................................................................................................ 43
My Practice ........................................................................................................... 46
Data Sources and Types ...................................................................................... 46
Community partner observations ........................................................................ 47
Interviews .............................................................................................................. 47
Data Analysis ........................................................................................................ 48
Ensuring Ethicality in My Practitioner Research .................................................. 50
Multimembership ................................................................................................. 51

Chapter 4: Analysis and Findings: Perspectives of the Community Education Partners ... 54

Community Partners’ Perspectives ....................................................................... 55
The Right to Speak and be Heard ........................................................................ 56
The Interviews ...................................................................................................... 58
Interviewing and power dynamics ..................................................................... 58
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Validity and reliability in interviews</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Community Partners</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grassroots</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Canadian – Jamaican Partnerships (CCJP)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre for Indigenous Teaching and Learning (CITL)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and Sustaining the Collaboration</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust and mutual respect</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate communication</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing an agenda</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for diversity</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for the culture of the setting</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensions</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Five: Analysis and Findings</strong></td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Role as the Teach for Change Liaison</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posing the Question</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconceptualizing ‘Practice’</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positioning My Practice</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigor and Trustworthiness</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Title</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answering the Research Question</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working the Dialectic of Practitioner Research</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Critical in Critical Practitioner Research?</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Reflection on Practice</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Take Away Points</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking in Support of, not on Behalf of</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Six: Conclusion</strong></td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging in a Conversation on Ethical and Professional Norms</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campano, Ghiso &amp; Welch’s Collaborative Research</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guidelines</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ethicality of Representation</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was My Research Really Critical Practitioner Research?</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Figures

Figure 1. Community Partners

Figure 2. Drake and Heath (2011) Practitioner knowledge at the doctoral level
Appendices

Appendix A. Information Letter for Teach for Change Community Members.......................... 120

Appendix B. Interview Protocol ........................................................................................................ 123
Chapter 1: Introduction

This study is based on my work as a liaison (2013-2016) for Teach for Change\(^1\) a social justice and alternative placement program. Teach for Change was a university–community partnership program for Bachelor of Education students enrolled at a Southern Ontario University. The purpose of my study was to examine the experiences and perspectives of community members in this university–community partnership. While there exists a substantial body of literature on university–community partnerships, there is a notable absence of community perspective in the literature (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Aims and Purpose of the Study

In this study, I researched the experiences of the community partners, and my own practice as the Teach for Change program liaison. The first research question I sought to answer was:

What are the experiences of the community partners in the Teach for Change program?

Included within this first question were 2 sub questions that attempted to pull out more specific findings about the experiences of the community partners:

1) Why choose to collaborate with the university on this program?

2) What are the tensions/benefits involved in this university-community partnership?

The second research question asked was:

How, if at all, do the perspectives from the community partners, inform my current/future practice as program liaison?

The sub questions were:

1) How, if at all, do the reasons for collaborating with the university inform my current/future practice?

\(^1\) A pseudonym
2) How, if at all, has/does/will my current /future practice been/be impacted by these benefits/tensions?

It was my intention that the findings of this study would lend important insights to address the paucity of literature examining the community perspective in university-community partnerships.

**Evolution of the Research Study**

Although I entered my Ph.D. program with a definite area of interest (social justice education), the specific contours of this thesis took time to materialize. My decision to undertake a critical practitioner methodology meant that I was going to be examining and questioning my positionality alongside the research (Cochran-smith & Lytle, 2009). Researching a project to which I was intimately connected meant that I had access to information and perspectives not available to an outside researcher. I needed to ensure that the members of the community education organizations and university involved felt comfortable with my position as peer and researcher. It also meant undertaking a less traditional approach to the research and that, at times, has pushed me out of my comfort zone.

My position as insider in this study gave me a unique perspective into the experiences of community partners and the opportunity to reflect upon how the experiences might inform my liaison work. Most research on university-community partnerships is from the perspective of university researchers (Schwartz 2010). My purpose was to obtain a nuanced understanding of the perspectives of community partners involved in collaborations, specifically where the community partners took the lead role. My role as liaison had me reporting to the steering committee that was, for the most part, directed by the community partners. My own perspective was deeply informed by the community organizations perspective, and I would argue my position was situated/located within the community organization context. My position as insider in my research study was encompassed by critical practitioner research. This perspective considers those who work in particular educational settings to be knowers, learners and researchers that have significant knowledge about those situations (Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 2009).
Positioning myself as insider meant that I needed to understand how I fit within the nuanced field of insider research. Unlike researchers who come with a ‘insider’ knowledge of the particular community they are researching, I located my insider view, namely as an employee of the program I was researching, within the framework that Marilyn Cochran-Smith & Susan Lytle’s provide of insider research/knowledge, “When insiders are systematically looking at their own practices, questioning their own assumptions… it can produce knowledge that is useful for the local community but also beyond the local community” (Cochran-Smith in Fiorentini & Crecci, 2014). The insider status that I occupied required me to reflect upon my practice, evaluate my research work against university criteria and to develop a reflective approach to my work.

**Context: Locating the Research**

The Teach for Change program was a partnership between three community education organizations, and the School of Education at a Southern Ontario University. The three community organizations were Grassroots, the Centre for Indigenous Teaching and Learning (CITL), the Centre for Canadian - Jamaican Partnerships (CCJP). Teach for Change was developed for teacher candidates as a series of interactive workshop and an alternative practicum that placed each student with one of the community education organizations partners. The mandate of the program was to provide teacher candidates with the opportunity to examine critical theories of education from anti-oppression and global perspectives, while developing tools to integrate critical pedagogy and Indigenous perspectives into their classroom practice.

Teach for Change was a participatory educational program that included an interactive workshop series, reflection and dialogues sessions and community placements. The program was designed to provide teacher candidates and other educators with the opportunity to examine critical theories of education from anti-oppression to education for change, develop strategies to create inclusive and equitable educational spaces and integrate subjects such as Indigenous ways of knowing and human rights into curriculum. Educators face a system that demands schools produce students who have an array of skills and knowledge that can meet the demands of the competitive global markets. In this system education is inextricably linked to the economy and debates about the purposes of teaching, learning, and schooling are often closed (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). By providing space for participants to engage in dialogue about their roles as educators, including posing questions about power/authority, equity, engagement and agency in
classrooms, Teach for Change looked to support educators to become agents for change in their schools and communities. Teach for Change attempted to unite theory and practice, as well as foster a network of educators engaged in social justice.

Teach for Change offered two paths for teacher candidates. Students could fulfill their alternative placement and work towards a social justice certificate, or they could work for their certificate and complete their alternative placement with another organization. For option one (certificate and placement) the requirements were:

- Mandatory participation in the program’s orientation, workshops, and Reflection and Dialogue sessions (R.A.Ds)
- Bring lesson plans into R.A.Ds and then facilitate a lesson or activity in the classroom
- Complete a placement at a one of the community organizations
- Present at the year end symposium.

For students who were interested in the certificate only the requirements were:

- Mandatory participation in the program’s orientation session, workshops, and reflection and dialogues sessions (R.A.Ds)
- 5 hours volunteering at a community related event (Elders Gathering, community film festival, Black History Month)
- Present at the year end symposium

Four core workshops were held from October through to February, with an accompanying reflection and discussion session (R.A.Ds) held two weeks after each workshop. Each partner community organization was responsible for one of the workshops, while the fourth workshop was a roundtable event that brought together guest speakers that speak to the themes explored in the previous three workshops.

The first workshop was an introduction to anti-oppression frameworks co-facilitated by a university faculty member on the program committee, and one of the community members, usually a member of the Centre for Canadian – Jamaican Partnerships (CCJP). In this workshop students explored anti-oppressive theory, focusing on systems of oppression (i.e racism, ableism,
sexism, etc.) and the ways they intersect and operate in society. The workshops worked to foster the development of participants’ abilities to undertake critical analyses by using participatory tools to locate power. Students explored the importance and application of equity and accessibility for creating positive and accountable learning spaces. There were various activities throughout the workshop that allowed students to collaboratively create strategies to dismantle barriers to, and within, education settings.

The second workshop was designed around Education for Change and looked at theories of critical pedagogy and popular education. Students explored the historical context of the popular education movement and contemporary context and applications of education for change. Students also addressed challenges and constraints that arise within teaching and learning in global education, with a focus on developing strategies for addressing them, both within a formal classroom setting and outside the traditional classroom.

The third workshop looked at Indigenous ways of teaching and learning. In the workshop students explored how teachers could work to incorporate the values and cultural knowledge of all the students in their class, focusing on Indigenous education and its relevance to all students. The workshop incorporated hands-on activities, talking circles, and guest speakers, and explored identity, decolonization, ally-ship and culturally relevant curriculum. Discussion centred on unpacking settler history and how to introduce hard topics into the classroom, while practicing self-care to ensure that students are able to share and learn in a safe space. There was also a focus on how to rethink our teaching of history and work toward a future, where Indigenous teachings are valued, and Indigenous students see themselves reflected in Canadian curriculum.

The last workshop focused on the role teachers and educators play related to local and global social justice and human rights issues—whether through linking their students to community initiatives or working directly for community-based organizations or initiatives. Guest speakers who were educators in both formal and non-formal settings were brought in to share and discuss their experiences. This workshop explored how educators can apply themselves beyond traditional educational settings and examined the challenges and rewards in connecting to the wider community.
While there was stability in the membership of the community partners, over the course of the two years key changes occurred regarding the program’s mandate and I describe these changes below.

Initially my involvement in the development of Teach for Change came at the suggestion of one of the partner organizations’ Executive Director who saw a strong connection between my research interests (critical pedagogy/social justice education, participatory action research) and the direction of the collaborative pilot project. I was invited to join the steering committee, which consisted of myself and one or two representatives from each of the partner organizations. We began to meet monthly starting in February 2013. The project developed as a Global Education certificate and alternative practicum program with each organization responsible for developing a workshop that explored different aspects of critical global education. In addition to four workshops there were four ‘reflection’ sessions that would follow each workshop. These reflections sessions were implemented with the express purpose of providing space for the teacher candidates to work through ideas/issues that may have arisen for them in the previous workshop.

The first year of the program ran from October 2013 to May 2014. By the end of the first year there were several significant issues that had emerged both from the perspective of the steering committee and the perspectives of the students. Several of us on the committee argued that the issues had to be addressed promptly in order for the program to move forward successfully in the following year. Due to the partner organizations’ programming/staffing restrictions and the fact that one of the organizations shut down every summer, the feasibility of the steering committee to engaging in the work necessary to tackle the program’s issues was limited. After meeting several times in May 2014, a committee colleague and I decided to put forth a proposal to the whole committee at the last steering committee meeting of the year. Our proposal was that a sub-committee be set up to work through the summer. The sub-committee’s mandate would be to examine the critiques the students and the committee itself had voiced about the program. We felt strongly enough about the need for this sub-committee that we agreed to meet on our own time, outside of any other commitments (work or research). We would keep the larger committee up-to-date through regular email correspondence and mini meetings. At the end of the summer we presented our ‘findings’ to the whole committee where they had the options to adopt, modify
or reject the proposals we put forth. After some hesitation upon the part of some committee members, an unanimous agreement was reached and my colleague and I set up the sub-committee. We were to be the two consistent members on the committee, but anyone from the committee was also invited to attend the summer meetings.

The critiques that had been voiced by the teacher candidates and some of the committee members most often centred on the structure and content of the program. Students voiced their dissatisfaction with the ‘casual’ structure of the program. The perception of the program as being too structurally casual was an issue with which that the committee also struggled. Several committee members felt the program had to retain an informal, ‘friendly/community’ approach, while others felt there had to be a better balance struck between the informal/formal structure that reflected the fact that the program was a collaboration between community education organizations (informal) and the University (formal). Addressing issues around time management and scheduling went a long way in rectifying the main critiques voiced by students and some members of the steering committee.

In terms of the content of the program, as we developed the pilot year it became clear that the program was really focusing on social justice issues and that the original theme of global education actually played a relatively insignificant role in the program. This was voiced by most of the students who stated that they had applied to the program with very little knowledge about global education, and that their decision to apply was based on their desire to be part of a ‘new’ program that linked them to communities outside the schools. The same students stated that by the end of the year they still were no closer to really knowing what global education was, but they felt much more knowledgeable about social justice issues. Most of the students in the program did not have any prior experience or clear understandings of social justice frameworks. These student assessments of the program resonated strongly with my colleague and myself. We had found that over the year we felt an increasingly urgent need to identify the program as a social justice education program. The program had very real strengths that we believed could only be supported and increased by locating it within social justice frameworks. These ‘strengths’ included a strong participatory/collaborative approach to learning and knowledge building, and a commitment to explore critical and anti-oppressive educational theories/frameworks. Also, the committee had all agreed that an important outcome of the
program should be that the participants develop their own community based on the knowledge and the experiences they shared/created together in the program throughout the year. My colleague and I felt that by identifying/naming the frameworks we were employing more definitively, and how these frameworks were situated within the field of education would allow students to have a stronger foundation on which to develop a community of like-minded colleagues.

The Research Problem

Partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions as a strategy for social change have gained recognition and momentum over the past two decades. Despite being formed with the best of intentions, however, authentic partnerships are very difficult to achieve. While academic partners have extensively documented their experiences and lessons learned, the voices of community partners are largely missing. This compilation of community partner reflections on a community-university partnership is one attempt to redress this imbalance, while also providing a resource to inform and strengthen these partnerships.

University–community partnerships, like most collaborations, are complex entities. There are important benefits as well as significant challenges for both sets of partners, and the complexity grows with the numbers of partners involved (multiple community partners in the case of my research). There are numerous types of university-community partnerships particularly in the interdisciplinary fields of community health, urban planning, civic engagement and service learning (Soska & Johnson Butterfield, 2006).

The term partnership in reference to university–community collaborations does not represent the actual power dynamics often at play. For example, a partnership can refer to a research project that is instigated by a university researcher/research team and is conducted the community in either a collaborative or non-collaborative manner. Similarly, such a partnership can refer to a situation in which a university “institutionalizes a structure within itself such as a Centre or not-for-profit organization that engages community members” (Soska & Johnson Butterfield, 2006, p. 2). In the case of Teach for Change, the partnership between the university and the community
organizations reflects a commitment to community-based experiential learning as well as a possible shift, even in the epistemological priorities and methodologies of the university (Peterson, 2009). While were tensions within our particular type of partnership, because of the leadership role taken by the community partners in the delivery of the program, the role of community partners were at least in theory, equal to, or more important than, the university partner. The program was centred around community-based work and learning and was developed and run by the community partners. Given the particular dynamics within Teach for Change I believe my research can contribute to a more fully nuanced community organization(s) perspective and voice to the university–community partnership discussion.

Doing a Critical Practitioner Research Study

As previously stated, I used a critical practitioner research methodology. In doing so I examined the “relationships between knowledge and practice and the role of practitioners in educational change” (Cochran-Smith & Lyle, 2009, p.19). Deciding to do a practitioner research study meant challenging my own ways of knowing and the construction of knowledge. Rather than doing research where I would be considered an outsider, I chose to examine the community partners, and my own connection and relationship, to the local knowledge contained within the Teach for Change Program.

One of the key elements of a practitioner dissertation, according to Drake and Heath (2011), is reflexivity. They define ‘reflexivity’ as “recognizing the part one plays in the research process” (p. 60) and “the awareness of the theorist of their unique part in the construction of new knowledge” (p.75). Drake and Heath stress the need to be reflexive, in research as well as in the writing of the thesis, to provide the project with “a degree of integrity and authenticity” (p. 36). Smith (2009) also emphasizes reflexivity in dissertation writing in order to “conceptualize, analyse and make transparent to others the researcher’s relationship with the research…to make the research authentic and credible to follow” (p. 42).

This research study is also meant to be a possible guide for those who wish to undertake similar work. I hope that my research study and findings will add insights to the theoretical and
conceptual discourse on practitioner inquiry. In addition, I believe my study adds to the literature reflecting community perspectives/voices within these partnerships.

Overview of the Chapters

In this introductory chapter, I have given a brief outline of my research, stating the main ideas contained in the thesis. The chapter contains an account of the background of my research, detailing the factors that formed the genesis of my research questions and my decision to use a critical practitioner methodology.

In Chapter Two, I review the literature on community education, community-university partnerships, social justice education and critical pedagogy. This chapter lays out the literature that allowed me to answer my research questions in Chapter Four and Five. Chapter Three examines my practitioner research methodology and my study’s research design and data analysis. Chapter Four explores the community partner organizations and their work. Community partners of the Teach for Change program were interviewed for this study. The main focus of this chapter is to present the findings contained in those interviews. The findings represent the partners’ reflections on the purpose and dynamics of the partnership, the benefits/tensions of the program, and what kind of space the program is developing.

Chapter Five explores the implications of the community liaison perspectives for a program such as Teach for Change and current/future practices. The audience for my research is a constant consideration given that I am researching my own practice. This is where my choice of methodology is so important to my study. As was aforementioned, in practitioner research the local context is the key starting point for knowledge generation and it is from there that we start to make broader/wider connections. In my study, as in the case of many practitioner research studies, starting from the local context can provide important knowledge about social and political issues.

By investigating my role in the development of a program that is intent on providing community spaces for social justice education I am able to contribute to a broader discussion that is becoming increasingly important as the purpose of education becomes a more contested concept.
My audience, therefore, are other practitioners/educators who are intent on supporting the development of spaces that challenge status quo educational practices. In order to do so it is imperative that we challenge oppressive and discriminatory practices in educational institutions and society. It is also research for practitioners [educators and administrators] who consider the partnerships between universities/colleges/schools and community organizations as being central to the development of these alternative spaces.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I consider Campano, Ghiso and Welch’s (2015) article Ethical and Professional Norms in Community-Based Research. I examine my own research study’s ethical norms, using Campano, Ghiso and Welch’s guidelines as a framework and finally present some of the research findings.
Chapter 2:  

In this chapter, I present a review of the literature that contains four main sections. First, I review the literature on community education. Second, I examine scholarly work on community-university partnerships. Third, I provide an overview of research on social justice education. Finally, I examine work on critical pedagogy, which is the theoretical foundation that grounds the social justice framework of the Teach for Change program. As mentioned in Chapter One, this study examines the experiences and the expectations of community education partners in a university-community partnership. It also reflects on the implications of the program’s successes and shares the challenges I encountered in my practice as a program liaison.

Most of the literature on community-university partnerships adopts the perspective of the university, although more recently there have been an effort to articulate a community voice in community engaged research (Jameson, Clayton, & Jaeger, 2010; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009). Despite this budding body of literature, however, research that focuses specifically on impacts of engagement from the perspective of community organizations involved in university-community partnerships remains under-represented. As a result, a need exists for a deepened understanding of what community partners believe constitutes partnerships with universities. In particular, there is very little literature on the partnerships between community education organizations and universities. The tensions that arose within the Teach for Change program stem not only from the expected issues that surface when partnerships are negotiated, but they also arose from differing perspectives on educational frameworks.
Community Education

The three community organizations involved in the Teach for Change program were all community education organizations, that embraced similar social justice educational frameworks in their outreach work. The decision to partner with the School of Education to develop Teach for Change came at the suggestion of some faculty members in the School of Education at a Southern Ontario University, who indicated that B.Ed students in their department had expressed an interest in exploring educational practices and frameworks from a community education perspective. It is important therefore to explore what is meant by the term community education.

Community education is “a process of communal education towards empowerment, both at an individual and a collective level” (National Adult Learning Organization 2006, p.110). Community education, therefore, is a movement and catalyst for social change and not only a ‘service’. Education does and should play a fundamental role in ensuring the redistribution of resources in society are pursued in a more equal way. Thus, community education is education and learning which is rooted in a process of grassroots, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness. It is within the community and developed by the community, reflecting the developing needs of individuals and their locale (p.113). It builds the capacity of local communities to engage in developing responses to educational and structural disadvantage and to take part in decision-making and policy-formation.

In the same vein as adult education, community education enables participants to emerge with more than new personal skills and knowledge. Participants have the capacity to engage in social action, developing skills for grassroots organizing and an ability to tackle issues of social justice. In this way, community education and community development share common ground and have strong overlap in their underpinning philosophies.

It can be argued that mainstream or formal education has the purpose of passing from generation to generation, information about existing norms and structures in society, to allow the learner to deal adequately with the world as they find it. Community education, in its most radical form, is politically engaged, leftist, and participatory. It is critical of traditional education practice and makes the argument that traditional education fosters hierarchy and inequality. An example of a community education project engaged in radical praxis is the Black Lives Matter Freedom
School. The community school is a 3 week long summer program for children aged 4 – 10 that serves as a response to a, “lack of humanizing, self-affirming, queer positive educational opportunities for Black children in the Greater Toronto Area” (www.BlackLivesMatter.com, 2017). The program is designed to teach children and families about Black Canadian and diasporic history, to engage children in political resistance to anti-Black racism and state violence through a trans-feminist lens, and to offer children an entry point into the Black Lives Matter movement.

The Ontario Coalition against Poverty (OCAP) is another example of a community organization engaged in radical community education campaigns that affect poor and working people. OCAP sponsors lectures and events on issues such as basic income, homelessness, gentrification, poverty and disability (https://ocaptoronto.wordpress.com, 2017). Both OCAP and the BLM movement are grassroots organizations that allow for their members to explore a deepening radical identity by serving in "free spaces," which are defined by "small-scale community or movement settings beyond the surveillance and control of institutionalized authorities” (Snow & Soule, 2010). The radical identity contained within these grassroots organizations is summed up best by Angela Davis's statement that "radical simply means grasping things at the root." This means that there is a basic authenticity in grassroots activism, and underscores a belief among activists that the grassroots are where the "action" is and where radicalism is thus enabled (Snow & Soule, 2010).

Although it can be said that community education sometimes fails to reach this level and that its transforming effects are limited, nonetheless it is underpinned by this radical theory. Traditional views of education place teachers and learners in a particular relationship, where the teacher holds the knowledge and power and decides what information is needed by the learner at any given time. In the community education model power is shared equally, and facilitator and participant engage together in the education process. Participants identify what knowledge is most useful to them, and this agenda is pursued in a flexible, developmental way.

With this view of community education as a movement or a catalyst for change in mind, I suggest that community education can be defined as being holistic. By this I mean that the program of learning being undertaken is merged into a wider learning experience within a
community education group or centre. The whole environment is learner rather than curriculum-centred, with specific attention being paid to welcoming and supporting each participant. Community based initiatives such as childcare provision, support in difficult times, counselling and the celebration of people’s lives are encouraged and feature very strongly.

Community education offers a non-threatening and non-competitive environment for learners who feel alienated from traditional education because of prior experience or socially rooted forms of exclusion. It provides the opportunity for adults to become involved in developing programs and to address the issues directly affecting their own lives. Learner experiences are valued, and become a learning tool. The power rests with the group, usually working in group sessions with a facilitator who recognizes their experiences as a base for learning, unlike the formal setting where a teacher holds power and learning focuses on the individual acquisition of knowledge.

Community education should work at different levels, and these levels are inter-related. At the individual level there is learning, both in terms of the acquisition of knowledge and skills, and more importantly in terms of confidence and self-development. At the group or community level, participants develop their capacity to interact as a group, to work on local issues that affect the group and to analyze their own and their community’s situation. At a political level, the learning is based on practical solidarity building strategies. An example of this solidarity was exemplified in the 2017 Toronto Pride parade wherein while allies flanked the BLM-TO marchers as a means of protection.

Depending upon the needs of the individuals, the community education process enables different outcomes. A mix of tangible and more qualitative outcomes is achieved at both individual and collective levels. Some examples are of these outcomes include:

Individual outcomes:
- Improved confidence and self-esteem
- Improved communication skills
- Improved ability to commit to and reach specific goals
- Increased knowledge, skills and competence
- Increased motivation and expectations
• Increased awareness of educational and life choices
• Awareness of self and community
• Critical thinking and analytical skills
• Accreditation

Collective Outcomes include:

• Development of a mutual support network
• Development of social consciousness and analysis
• Development of capacity to influence policy and decision making
• Ability to organize further personal and group development
• Action to tackle social and community issues

Education in all of its forms fosters engagement with community, society and the world around us. The outline above of the ethos, purpose and processes of community education, suggests that it has a particular role to play in creating a more active civil society. Membership of a community group can in itself be seen as active participation. Connolly (2003) suggests that a central function of community education has been the provision of “a forum for listening to the voices of otherwise silenced people” (p. 343). In its emergence within the women’s movement, and in its subsequent adoption by a range of other groups for use as a development tool, community education has offered a way in which people who feel excluded can express their views and have them valued. It has provided a means for individuals to find solidarity with others, and to develop mutual respect. This has allowed groups to organize around social issues and become active agents in their communities and beyond. Any group, whether geographical or issues based, can use community education methods to analyze, critique and address the causes of the group’s poverty or exclusion. In the 1960s., the Black Panthers developed a breakfast program that led to further efforts to provide free clothing and shoes, medical services – including drug and alcohol awareness, - legal programs in the nation, preceding Head Start (Collier, 2015). In this context, community education plays an important role in channeling the views of citizens into action. Its democratic processes enable people to make the connection between the personal and the political (Connolly, 2003. Those who feel powerless in the face of state and social structures can find ways to influence their own lives
According to Barr, Hamilton, and Purcell (1996), community education is a process whereby learning is used for individual, community and global betterment. This definition posits community education as a form of education that is essentially grassroots and associational in orientation. Therefore, success is not conveyed by official mechanisms of assessment, but success is weighted in favour of the educational process in which the participant engages and not a preconceived end product that may be traditionally measured. This vision of community education is one in which powerful learning draws on participants as experienced and knowledgeable social actors who are able to actively engage together in processes of dialogue, reflection and action. Issues in this context would not be predetermined by the limitations of community planning or preconceived units of learning, but they would grow out of the creativity, energy and commitments of community educators and local people working together.

Sommerlad (2003) has identified the often uncritical nature of community education practice, the limited pedagogic frameworks employed and the focus on instrumental learning within democratic aspirations. It is key that practitioners recognize that their work is political. It is also essential that educators involved in community education develop politically and socially engaged programs that offer insight into the important struggles people around the world are engaged in to create a more just and responsive world. Elements of the above vision initially brought together three community education organizations in January 2013 to develop the Teach for Change program.

Envisioning a program from the position such as that described above does not always neatly fit with the mandate of the education program at the university. Fundamentally, there are definitive objectives that a B.Ed program must fulfill that do not necessarily facilitate the inclusion of discussions around social and political struggles. In this way, the approach to education taken by the community organizations and the university can diverge enough that tensions arise as to how to approach traditional educational curriculum using a community education lens. Similarly, all forms of collaboration involve different customary modes of work and commitments to social justice, in addition to considerations of race, class, income, age, and gender diversities (Brown-Luthango 2012). If unattended, differences stand to undermine collaborations while fostering power imbalances that equally result in unsatisfactory engagements (Netshandama 2010).
Community-university partnerships

According to Curwood, Farrar and Mackeigan (2011), a university community partnership can be defined as “collaborations between community organizations and institutions of higher education for the purpose of achieving an identified social change goal through community engaged scholarship that ensures mutual benefit for the community organization and the university” (p. 16). Strier (2014) points out that university-community partnership are an umbrella term for various types of engagement, modes of operation, scopes of activities, and levels of commitments. He notes that the concept of partnership is discursive and may include a partnership with an individual faculty member engaged in research within the community for two semesters as a community-university partnership. However, the partnership may also be between an entire institution and numerous community partners over a number of years. Additionally, the concept of ‘community’ is broad and represents “individuals (neighbours), institutions (school or community agencies), or social groups (geographical, functional or virtual communities)” (Strier, 2014; p. 156).

The development of community-university partnerships over the past two decades is seen as a move by institutions of higher education to engage with communities in democratic ways, which include inclusive, reciprocal problem-oriented work that brings together university and community stakeholders as co-generators of knowledge (Dostilio, 2014). The resulting democratically engaged partnerships position diverse members to take on roles as collaborators and problem solvers; they are mutually transformed through the processes of reciprocation, power diffusion, and knowledge generation (Dostilio, 2014). In this context, community-university partnerships are based on the principle that both individuals from community organizations and universities can work together toward a common goal resulting in mutual benefits for all those involved (Balcazar, Harper & Lewis 2005). Developing and sustaining the relationship is influenced by factors such as mutual trust, adequate communication, respecting diversity/difference and overall agreement on a collaborative agenda regarding the purpose of the project/program. If successful, the process can lead to significant benefits for both the community and university partners, including increased funding for community organizations, the development of other important educational programming opportunities, as well as a rise in capacity and skills building.
Winkler (2013) suggests that if universities hope to facilitate successful collaborations with community partners, the importance of “entry” into a community must be viewed as essential. Additionally, there is the implicit need to also know how to build and maintain longer-term relationships between university and community partners, so that power imbalances are continually addressed (Bowl 2010; Ochocka, Moorlag, and Janzen 2010) further recommend the active involvement of community partners during each phase of the program. This includes the planning process, where collaboration is necessary to identify the issues under study as well as the desired outcomes, and the data collection and analyses phases of a project to the development of implementable proposals. In other words, successful partnerships are based on establishing trust and transparency during all phases of a project. The issue of trust is of particular significance in a partnership such as Teach for Change where the community partners were attempting to establish important connections with the university. The importance lies in the fact that such connections may very well enable community organizations to apply for more funding and allow them a more secure footing in an environment where funding for non-for-profit organizations is ever decreasing. Successful partnerships also rely on accountability. Specifically, both university and community partners need to be accountable to one another if these partners are going to find ways to move forward together into new territory.

Establishing trust and transparency—while engaging in the coproduction of accountable outcomes—necessitates “sophisticated knowledge and skills, [and] years of time” (Baum 2000, 294). But the time required to meet these challenges is often curtailed by predetermined and inflexible university schedules that do not always accord with the more flexible community partners’ time frames, schedules, or requirements. Similarly, the time required to build trust within a collaborative initiative might be hampered by previous, but unsatisfactory, engagements with higher education institutions (Netshandama 2010). Unsatisfactory engagements usually arise from unmet expectations. To avoid the potential risks that can arise from unmet expectations, Winkler (2013) suggests goals and outcomes must be clearly articulated and negotiated at the outset of the collaborative project/program.

The manner in which engagement between communities and universities are established is perhaps one of the most important considerations as to the success of the partnerships. As I will further discuss in Chapter 4, the manner of how the community partners entered and "engaged"
with the university (informally) led to a general lack of meaningful recognition by the university’s administration for the Teach for Change program.

Contained within this discussion of processes of engagement is the issue of how to build an infrastructure that creates trust, commitment and an overall understanding for a sustainable partnership. Russell and Flynn (2009) maintain that sustainable partnerships should include the whole university including administrative staff, senior management and academics. This is, as I will discuss in Chapter 4, a very different approach than was taken in the initial development of the Teach for Change program, where only the involvement of one faculty member constituted the university partner. Shea (2011) argues that institutional level commitment is important for handling issues such as a long-term funding strategy, transition plans and inevitable changes in leadership. Boyle, Ross and Stephens (2009) suggest that long-term, intellectually based engagement of academics goes hand in hand with the administrative infrastructure to ensure the time commitment and ongoing support essential to sustained community partnerships. Ultimately the Teach for Change program had the task of engaging the broader university community.

Another challenge, and in the case of this study one of the key research questions, is the actual extent to which the community partners benefit from these partnerships. The primary concern of most community-university collaborations tends to be (and arguably should be) for the educational well-being and fulfillment of the students enrolled in the community/university program. There is a danger that the output of the community organizations themselves is reduced to little more than an extension of the university program in which the students are enrolled. Freire (1970) argued that there is never a neutral relationship in regards to power, as someone always has more power in every relationship; therefore, universities need to take steps to increase the buy-in and power held by the community organizations. The building of an effective university and community partnership demands the balancing of unequal power between the two partners. One of the most significant ways this can be achieved is by ensuring that university and community partnerships move beyond the rhetoric of collaboration, which requires universities to shift the university culture to value community knowledge and truly share power with community stakeholders (Curwood, Farrar & Mackeigan, 2011). The significance of the need for this shift in university culture is evident in the context of the Teach for Change program where it
was sometimes questionable how the community partners benefitted in the context of minimal university commitment/involvement.

Gray (2004) notes several issues that present obstacles to building and creating successful community partnerships. These include: institutional tensions, unequal power relations, conflict of interests, poor planning, lack of ongoing evaluation processes, competition over resources and recognition, stakeholders’ differential knowledge and experience, value clashes, mistrust, and frequent uncertainty about the viability of the proposed outcomes. Altman (1995) asserts that additional obstacles are generated over control, ownership, funding and a lack of sustainability from partnerships. Together, these obstacles create fertile ground for partnership relations to become shrouded in mistrust and conflict (Maginn, 2007).

Social Justice Education

The community education organizations that are part of this study had a general focus on educational theory and practice that is rooted in positive social change through the promotion of social justice and equity (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Ochocka and Janzen 2007). More specifically they predominately focus on theories of adult/popular education and, to a lesser extent, critical pedagogy. The purpose of Teach for Change was to create an alternative space within a teacher education program to explore issues of social justice and equity. The community partners set out to design a program that challenged inequities and injustices that prevail in education and society, and to encourage the teacher candidates to interrogate and question their own positioning, beliefs and attitudes. Teacher candidates were asked to reflect on how traditional educational practices are invested in sustaining the status quo, and how it is possible for them working within this system to advocate for a more just and more equitable society at an individual and/or collective level.

Differing perceptions of what social justice means, has led to differing notions of what social education looks like. Zollers, Albert, and Cochran-Smith (2000) suggest that despite an unanimously shared goal of teaching for social justice within their teacher education program, they and their colleagues had a range of different understandings and definitions of social justice
that complicated their efforts. They identified three categories where they shared commitments towards social justice, but had differing beliefs about what those commitments actually meant. For example, they all agreed that “fairness is the sine qua non of a socially just society” (p. 5). However, they all defined fairness in divergent ways, from meaning sameness or equal distribution, to meaning equitable though potentially different treatment across groups. They also agreed that change was necessary, but varied in their ideas about the locus of that change, holding positions on a continuum from looking at individual responsibility to focusing on institutional responsibility. Similarly, in terms of the actual work of implementing social justice, their beliefs ranged on a continuum from changing individual assumptions and perspectives to engaging in collective action. Not surprisingly these differences in beliefs surfaced between partners in the Teach for Change program, a significant issue that I discuss further in Chapter Five. As discussed in Chapter Four, differences in how to implement social justice frameworks led to a distinct change of direction in program ‘branding’ at the end of the first year. A fundamental difference of opinion occurred as to what the mandate of the program was—a program focusing on social justice education, or a program that incorporated aspects of social justice education. In the end, the decision was made to fully identify as a program promoting and supporting social justice education.

Within social justice education there is a wide and often diverse breadth of meaning. Writings in the philosophical or conceptual strand of the literature aim to define the meaning of justice in abstract, philosophical and/or theoretical terms. Lynch and Baker (2005) call for equality of condition as a central criterion of justice in education. They argue that we must look for equality in five dimensions, including: “resources; respect and recognition; love, care and solidarity; power; and working and learning” (p. 132). Within each of these dimensions, they describe how we may change educational practices to support a more holistic vision of equality in education. The primary strength of the philosophical/conceptual strand of social justice work is that it helps us to get greater clarity about our assumptions, terms and visions. Philosophical work on the meaning of social justice provides us with a framework to conceptualize and articulate our theories and practices. Not surprisingly, however, the often abstract language of philosophy is often alienating and seemingly inconsequential to the everyday concerns of most educational practitioners. In Teach for Change workshops, the teacher candidates often complained of being put off by this kind of writing in their course work. Indeed, they reported that they found it hard
to enter the discourse and could not fathom out how to apply seemingly abstract principles to their everyday lives and practice.

In contrast to the more abstract and philosophical writings on social justice, practical theories offer criteria for what socially just practice in education would look like. For example, writers in this genre often offer lists of conditions or competencies of what would be present in a just school or in a teacher education program that is grounded on a vision of social justice, or of the competencies needed for socially just teaching or leadership. In terms of visions for just schools, Carlisle, Jackson, and George (2006) offer one such model, built on five principles. They argue that a just school would promote inclusion and equity, hold high expectations for all students, develop reciprocal community relationships, involve a system wide approach, and entail direct social justice education and intervention (pp. 57-61). The ‘practice of social justice’ was reflected within the Teach for Change program far more than the more philosophical strand of social justice. The raising of practice over philosophy in the program stands in line with the outreach programs that the three community education partners implement, but it also reflects the program’s attempt to open the discussion around education to a wider audience than just the academy.

Michelli and Keiser (2005) list six conditions, or action plans, that they claim, “taken together, would reseed the notions of equity and social justice throughout teacher education” (p.51). Such justice oriented teacher education programs would first clearly define how they understand social justice and the challenges in actualizing it and would pay specific attention to how to do so in a climate dominated by calls for standardization. Second, they would reinforce the potential for schools to promote social justice in their everyday practices and policies. Third, they would describe, promote and model successful existing practices and programs. Fourth a concerted effort would be made to deal proactively with the fears and concerns of prospective teachers when they confront perspectives different from their own. Fifth, they would incorporate global perspectives and a better understanding of the dynamics of globalization into their programs. Finally, they would organize and collaborate at a variety of different levels to support and defend public education (pp. 51-54).
Bettez (2008), in her discussion of university teaching, outlines seven skills, practices and dispositions of activist social justice education. These include:

“(1) promoting a mind/body connection, (2) conducting artful facilitation that promotes critical thinking, (3) engaging in explicit discussions of power, privilege, and oppression, (4) maintaining compassion for students, (5) believing that change toward social justice is possible, (6) exercising self-care, and (7) building critical communities” (p. 276).

Speaking about competencies necessary for educators committed to social justice concerns, Hackman (2005) says there are five essential knowledge base components of social justice education. She argues that to educate for social justice, teachers need: 1) mastery of content in their discipline (including knowing factual information); 2) the ability to historically contextualize that information and being able to consider it in both micro and macro ways; 3) tools for critical thinking and analysis; 4) tools for social change and activism as well as tools for personal reflection (especially about one’s own power and privilege), and; 5) awareness of multicultural group dynamics.

Grant and Gillette (2006) also claim that there are a number of knowledge bases necessary for effective, socially just teaching that supports the learning of all children. They suggest that teachers need to be culturally responsive in the classroom, to know themselves and be open to change, to hold a well-developed philosophy of education, to have substantial pedagogical content knowledge, to maintain an educational psychology that is multicultural, and to connect teacher education to the world outside of school. There are also skills that effective educators need such as the ability to be reflective, to analyze and act on teacher-generated research data, to communicate and collaborate, to build relationships, to arrange learning environments and to use technology as a teaching-learning tool.

Marshall and Gerstl-Pepin (2005) suggest five leadership perspectives help to support social justice advocacy in schools. They claim that leaders must be critically pluralist and democratic, transformative, moral and ethical, feminist/caring, and spiritually/culturally responsive (pp. 268-271). In addition to lists of components/attributes that would characterize socially just schools, leaders, and education programs, this strand of work also includes descriptions or models of programs oriented towards social justice. The most significant value of this practical strand of literature is that it provides specific examples of what schools have done and of what works in
challenging inequities and creating more genuine equality of opportunity. While this type of writing provides hope, it is sometimes decontextualized and under theorized. Thus, it is sometimes difficult to see how to translate examples from one place to the specific situations in which people find themselves, or how to create the momentum and support for such change in climates where a shared vision of working toward social justice is not already in place.

Illustrating the fuller context of what it means to work for social justice, particularly as it is often represented in community education, is perhaps best represented by the qualitative detail and depth of social justice literature that is ethnographic and narrative in structure. These works provide personalized examples of how educators can support and facilitate students’ awareness. These types of works can be developed and shared through the use of community dialogues, in which people from distinct social groups engage in conversation around social injustices or problems and their impact on group members. Group discussions promote participants’ understanding of multiple perspectives, provoke reflection around social identities, and allow participants to constructively resolve inter-group and interpersonal conflicts. The community facilitators for Teach for Change found these types of group discussions particularly useful with the teacher candidates as it allowed participants to explore and unpack complex issues around positionality.

The ethnographic and narrative works created in one of the Teach for Change workshops offered very personal portraits by the teacher candidates of injustice related to schools and education, and narratives about personal experiences of lived injustice. As was evidenced in the workshop writings in this strand tend to be passionate and evocative. As opposed to creating categories and definitions, or offering broad principles for just practices, the primary focus of these works is to more vividly capture some lived consequences of injustice and to offer rich images of more just social and educational practices.

While they can be deeply personal, these ethnographic and narrative pieces also often include philosophical, conceptual, practical and theoretical components, especially when they explicitly address assumptions, data analysis and interpretation. Perhaps the most heavily cited ethnographic/journalistic chronicler of injustice in schools is Jonathan Kozol. From describing his early teaching experiences in Boston Public Schools in Death at an Early Age (1967) through
his most recent work, The Shame of the Nation (2005), Kozol has been documenting the extreme inequities that exist in the educational opportunities provided to children in the United States. In Savage Inequalities (1991), Kozol describes his experiences visiting schools and neighborhoods in both the poorest and wealthiest cities in the United States. Using statistics, voices of children and teachers, descriptive images and personal narrative, Kozol offers a compelling portrait of the disparate school experiences of children, especially along lines of race and class. He characterizes the ways in which injustices are fueled by pervasive racial segregation, extreme social and institutional poverty, and willful neglect by those with wealth and power.

In addition to ethnographies, there are a variety of other types of reflective, autobiographical and narrative works that address social justice issues, both inside and outside of schools. This genre of literature often include examples of works that are written by people in community education that seek to provide lenses into how injustice plays out in people’s everyday lives. Thus, they provide more personalized invitations into considering what it means to ground educational commitments in social justice. In ways that cannot be accomplished through heavily theoretical discourses, this narrative voice especially appeals to students and educators who are new to social justice as a framing lens as they are viscerally moved by experiences that are both resonant with, and foreign to, their own.

There are also scholars who theorize largely through narrative, for example bell hooks. In her three books explicitly dedicated to education, Teaching to Transgress (1994), Teaching Community (2003), and Teaching Critical Thinking (2010) hooks tells personal stories of her life as a child in segregated schools and her experiences as a black woman teacher working to help students to transgress racism, classism, and sexism in order to move towards freedom and justice. Throughout her experiential stories, she steadfastly maintains the power of classroom spaces to compel social justice work, arguing that they are one of the most important locations “where individuals can experience support for acquiring a critical consciousness, for any commitment to end domination” (2003, p. 45).

The overriding goal of much of this type of social justice writing is to increase understandings of personal experience related to difference and discrimination. Voices from experience often compel and move readers differently than the seemingly more abstract theories and arguments
about justice. They call for connection on a personal level, for readers to see injustices and their consequences through the eyes of real people. In community education programs, these types of narrative and personal writings help to promote self-reflection among students/educators, particularly as they learn to locate and consider their own experiences in relation to the narratives they read. Narratives provide rich and contextual examples for what educators might do, either through positive accounts that can be followed as models or negative accounts that serve as warnings for what to avoid.

At the same time, one of the struggles people have with narrative writings involves knowing how to enter them and to speak with and back to them. It is often difficult to hear experiences of pain and suffering, and to see the ways we may be implicated in their reproduction and/or implicated in seeing others as simply victims of oppressive systems. Yet in connection with some of the other strands of social justice work, these narrative pieces help to keep human faces, real people, centrally positioned in our thinking about what it means to work for justice. However, it is essential that there is adequate time and space provided to reflect upon the impact that some of these stories have. One of the main concerns that arose in Teach for Change workshops was the possible danger of having people share intimate stories without time set aside to deal with the emotional responses that both the authors and the audience may have in response to shared stories that deal with the deeply affecting aspects of social injustice.

Scholars of a more radical social justice declare that education is a foundation of social change. Radical social justice suggests that education in this context possesses a considerable potential for change and needs to create an arena where real global and local issues may be addressed. Radical social justice presents a critique of capitalism that involves looking at all forms of inequality in capitalism: class inequality, sexism, racism, and discrimination against different groups of people. Young (1997) defines social justice as both a process and a goal for society that promotes mutual cooperation, socio-economic justice and physical and psychological safety for all its members.
Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy as an educational movement aimed explicitly at transforming oppressive social structures was explored to a certain extent in the Teach for Change workshops. While there are a variety of traditions within critical pedagogy, they all share a broad objective “to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (McLaren, 2003, p. 186). Critical pedagogues draw inspiration from Paulo Freire’s work, most notably Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2000). In his text, Freire argues that rather than helping people to become critically literate and reflective agents in the world, traditional “banking” (p. 80) education instead domesticates, dehumanizes and oppresses people. He offers an alternative vision for education that is built around problem-posing and is aimed at helping people to achieve ‘conscientization’ or critical consciousness. Here critical consciousness is the ability to “perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 2000, p. 35).

The advancement of transformative possibility though critical consciousness is realized in different ways by different theorists (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987; Freire, 2000, 2005; hooks, 1994, 2003, 2010; McLaren, 2003; Shor, 1987, 1992; Villnueva, 1999). Feminist theory, critical race theory, and class theory, for example, each represent a nuanced articulation of critical theory, and each hedge toward their own unique pedagogical concerns. The unifying stand that binds them, however, is a common commitment to improved societal equity through the development of critical awareness, albeit in various forms. Whatever shape it may take, teaching for critical consciousness involves asking students and teachers to jointly re-envision the world that surrounds and informs them; to work together to uncover and interrogate the hidden narratives that shape their lives and perspectives.

Yet critical teaching does not ask participants to interrogate dominant ideology simply for the sake of examination alone, nor does it entail the passive transfer of dogmatic knowledge from the expert teacher to the student receptacle. Instead, as Henry Giroux (2011) suggests:

Critical pedagogy asserts that students can engage their own learning from a position of agency and in so doing can actively participate in narrating their identities through a culture of questioning that opens up a space of translation between the private and public while changing the forms of self and social recognition (2011, p.14).
In other words, critical pedagogy embodies democratic principles, in both form and function. It does this by asking both teachers and students to become active collaborators in the radical transformation of their understanding of not only their world, but also their very selves in meaningful ways through critical awareness, with an eye toward promoting social justice and responsible citizenship.

Ultimately, critical pedagogy is about enabling multiple forms of agency in education. Although critical teaching is explicit in its commitment to societal transformation through altered consciousness, it is of paramount importance for the critical pedagogue to recognize that classroom participants are not only charged with critiquing the exterior world. Indeed, they are also being asked to conduct a meaningful interior examination of their own selves. The development of critical consciousness is a two-fold process: it requires participants to craft new perceptions of the world, representing a turn outward, as well as to focus the lens inward and experience themselves anew. As social beings, students are asked to investigate how their actions might either counter or contribute to hegemonic ideology. The dual components of examination of the world and the self cannot be divorced from each other if transformative consciousness is to be developed.

Critical pedagogy, as articulated by Freire, is concerned primarily with teaching students to read the “word” and read the “world.” It is about fostering a critical perception of the world, about raising awareness and consciousness about the realities that surround, shape, and inform us. How can this realistically be achieved if the realities of students are ignored and teachers operate with the intent of instilling their views on students? How can students stripped of agency possibly engage in meaningful and genuine critical thinking? Freire argues they cannot; he asserts that transformative consciousness through education is achievable only through mutual respect and dialogue between teachers, students, and their historical locations (2000). The intersections of these three players form the basis of the content in Freire’s articulation of the critical teaching project.

While Freire argues for a “student centred” approach to teaching, he is careful not to conflate student “identity” with student “experience.” While critical teaching must begin with an earnest acknowledgement of students’ historical locations “if they are to purposefully interrogate them,
it does not necessitate that the classroom content indulge in an overdose of experiential celebration...[which] exoticizes discussing lived experiences as a process of coming to voice” (2000, p. 381). By design, critical teaching is born of, and therefore must begin with, the historical exigencies and situations surrounding students’ lives; but this does not mean that students’ lived experiences form the crux of critical pedagogy. It only means that if critical teaching hopes to achieve transformative, critical consciousness, the legitimacy of students’ perspectives and positionality must be acknowledged.

In Empowering Education, Ira Shor (1992) acknowledges that critical teaching does begin with what students bring with them to class. However, the acknowledgement that critical pedagogy emerges from students’ (and teachers’ and schools’) historical locations should not be confused with a privileging, or even focus on, concrete experience. It begins with student agency, but critical teaching is not about student experience. It is about a critical engagement with the historical setting surrounding students, which, incidentally, cannot be conducted without honouring student identity and location. Shor (1992) corroborates the Freireian idea of promoting student agency and identity when he states that problem-posing education “frontloads student thought and backloads teacher commentary” (p. 147). Unlike the banking style of education where student identity was dismissed as irrelevant or denied outright, Freire’s articulation of critical pedagogy is operable only when student identity and situation are seen as legitimate starting points for engaged dialogue. bell hooks (2010) argues that while Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed was never intended to function as a universally applicable method for critical teaching, the scaffolding that it built continues to function as a guide for progressive educators working to redefine teaching in liberatory and transformative ways.

Freire’s emancipatory work informed my own analysis of the community-university partnership underpinning the Teach for Change program. Freire’s articulation of the manner in which students’ identity and situation must be the starting point for truly transformative education, provided me a framework to explore the position that community members occupy in their relationship to academic partners. In much the same way that students have had to endure the system of banking education, community members have had ‘knowledge’ handed down to them. This is knowledge from outside academic partners whose research often usurps and replaces the community members’ own inside, locally generated knowledge. Likewise, the tendency to
“exoticizes discussing lived experiences as a process of coming to voice” (2000, p. 381) echoed my own struggle to legitimately present the perspectives of the community partners, as opposed to suggesting I was giving them a voice. I explore this struggle in more detail in Chapters Four and Five.

While Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1999) stands most obviously as a cultural and feminist critique of hegemonic language practices in America, it draws heavily on the principle of heightened awareness and consciousness that is foundational to the critical theory developed by Freire. In detailing how the modern mestiza can overcome cultural, masculine and linguistic hegemony, Anzaldúa makes repeated reference to creating a new consciousness, one capable of paradigm breaking. The new mestiza, she argues, “reinterprets history and, using new symbols”. She adopts new perspectives toward the “dark-skinned, women, and queers” (p. 104).

While perhaps not readily obvious, undergirding Anzaldúa’s claims is a belief in the transformative potentiality that can be achieved via critical consciousness. Anzaldúa also draws apparent inspiration from Freireian critical theory when she writes that, “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once, at once see through serpent and eagle eyes” (p. 101).

Anzaldúa’s work also informed my analysis of the project, in particular how transformative potentiality is only possible through critical consciousness, and what happens when that critical consciousness does not fully develop. I explore the ideas of transformative potentiality in the context of the constraints I found in the development of the Teach for Change program when the community partners were unable to fully engage in a new consciousness regarding the programs direction and purpose. This analysis is discussed more in Chapter Five.

Likewise, Ira Shor (1992) has argued extensively about the need to raise the profile of social class issues in the educational system. His class-based interrogation of the community and vocational college system in the U.S, while certainly nuanced, is formed around the principles basic to Freire’s notion of critical theory. Transplanting the Freireian model of critical teaching, Shor finds that the most effective means for combating the storage system of higher education that has become culturally engrained in Americans is to develop a teaching model that “examines
familiar systems in an unfamiliar way,” which enables “transcendent changes [to] become possible” (p. 93). Much like Freire argues about the normalizing, oppressive function of the banking style of education, Shor contends that the general populace has been conditioned to accept as natural the oppressive aspects tacitly attached to vocational schooling and community colleges. He posits that the primary means to combat oppressive “false consciousness” fed to the working class is through a “liberatory teaching ideology that forwards critical thinking and prepares students to become their own agents in the creation of a democratic culture” (p. 48).

Victor Villanueva’s (1999) presents a critique of the racial and class hegemony inherent to the twin American educational myths of meritocracy and rugged individualism in his seminal work Bootstraps. Villanueva’s arguments against, and suggested remedies for, the failures of the educational system are framed well within the realm of Freire’s critical theory. For Villanueva, the ultimate goal of education should be to expose students to “differences and similarities within the literacy conventions they have to contend with, to know the traditional norms while also appraising them, looking at the norms critically” (p. 100). Teaching can counter hegemony through a dialogic, critical examination of societal discourses, both dominant and minority. Villanueva’s implementation of critical theory is nuanced and distinct from other articulations, especially by its unique use of narrative form, but underwriting it is an objective common all forms of critical theory: transformative possibility through the development of critical consciousness.

All of these pedagogies, while unique each in their own right, exemplify the divergent trajectories that critical pedagogy has the potential to embody. Yet despite their differences, there is a tie that binds them: a belief that education is more than depositing. Indeed, all of these theorists would agree that despite what the content focus is, teaching is about students transforming their minds and lives through critical consciousness. Critical teaching is more of an ideology, it is a belief in the transformative possibility in education. Thus, it does not rest on a particular style or teaching method; its historical roots and design resist a singular definition.

Peter McLaren (2007) trenchantly assesses that critical pedagogy cannot be pinned down as one specific set of classroom practices; it is a mass conglomerate that is comprised of a multiplicity of pedagogical foci with a unifying goal. McLaren posits that “Critical pedagogy does not,
however, constitute a homogenous set of ideas. It is more accurate to say that critical theorists are united in their objective: to empower the powerless and transform existing social inequalities and injustices” (p. 186). While critical pedagogies may take varied and nuanced forms, they all are bound by their shared commitment to the transformative potential found in teaching for critical consciousness.

Freire’s vision for a liberatory pedagogy is predicated on the dissolution of the traditional power hierarchies between teachers and students. Freire theorized that “The teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow” (2005, p. 61). This is not to say, however, that a critical teacher should relinquish all culpability for her class, which would certainly be irresponsible and counterproductive. Indeed, one of the cornerstones of Freirean theory is that the classroom is never ideologically neutral. Teachers cannot absolve themselves of authority, nor can they be fully non-directive in structuring the classroom. However, Freire is careful to draw a distinction between authority and authoritarianism. Teachers can maintain a level of authority in the critical classroom by “helping learners get involved in planning education, helping them create the critical capacity to consider and participate in the direction and dreams of education, rather than following blindly” (2000, p. 379). In a classroom committed to critical consciousness, teachers and students bear joint responsibility for, and authority in, the creation of the learning process.

Despite the significant volume of social justice work in education, one of the pieces that seems to be missing is a genuine dialogue across various positions. This lack of dialogue presents a situation where it is difficult to build on the strengths of various theorists, as well as to better acknowledge challenges and reflect on the complexities of education for social justice. Engaging in this form of genuine dialogue was key for Teach for Change in working towards creating a space where teacher candidates and other educators could come together to engage in the difficult work of making connections, building bridges, and developing alliances that may help to more effectively ground a social justice agenda in schools and society. This work is especially imperative at a time when the commitment to social justice in education is under attack.
Speaking in particular about creating more empowering teaching practices, hooks (1994) writes “that it is crucial that critical thinkers who want to change our teaching practices talk to one another, collaborate in a discussion that crosses boundaries and creates a space for intervention” (p. 129). Ultimately, programs such as Teach for Change will hopefully create openings for more sustained dialogue among educators who share similar and often overlapping goals, and contribute to opening up new angles for seeing and new possibilities for engaging each other across differing passions, commitments and agendas.

In this chapter, I presented literature reviews of the four topics that deeply inform my research study. I explored the complexities of social justice education and the different strands that inform it. It was my intention to contextualize the Teach for Change program in this particular discussion, thus setting up the discussions in Chapters Four and Five around the challenges Teach for Change faced being identified as a social justice program. In the next Chapter, I move into a discussion of my methodology and how it contributed to the overall focus and development of my research.
Chapter Three: Methodology

I researched the experiences of the community partners, and my own practice as the program liaison. To undertake my research study, I used a practitioner research methodology. Grounded in the tradition of Freire’s (1970) notion of praxis, practitioner research identifies the dialectical relationship between research and practice, researcher and practitioner, knowing and doing, analyzing and acting. It also positions practitioners as engaging in intellectual work in their every-day practices. This intellectual work is embedded in how practitioners engage in practitioner inquiry, it challenge how, and by whom, knowledge is generated, and how knowledge is used and evaluated (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). The debate of what counts as knowledge, to whom and how knowledge is used and evaluated, is of particular significance given that perspective of community partners is often under-represented in university-community research collaborations.

Deciding to do a practitioner research study meant challenging my own ways of knowing and the construction of knowledge. Rather than doing research where I would be considered an outsider, I chose to examine the community partners, and my own connection and relationship to the local knowledge contained within the Teach for Change Program. In this way my research is building, interrogating, elaborating and critiquing conceptual frameworks as they were developed within Teach for Change and then exploring to find how these frameworks connect to larger social, cultural, and political issues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Practitioner research, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) point out, “does not fit neatly into the categories of either solely empirical or solely conceptual research; instead it is best understood as a hybrid based on the dialectic of the two” (p. 95). Practitioner research thus challenges and intentionally muddies this traditional distinction. The authors provide two tentative labels for practitioner research resulting from the dialectic of the practice and research: conceptual-empirical inquiry (with a heavier leaning towards conceptual research) and empirical-conceptual inquiry (with a heavier leaning towards empirical research). They further write:
By definition, practitioner research is grounded in the identification and empirical documentation of the daily dilemmas and contradictions of practice, which then become grist for development of new frameworks and theories. In turn, these new distinctions and concepts guide new understandings and improvements in practice in the local site, as well as more broadly. (p. 95)

I begin this chapter with a discussion of practitioner research and the research design of my study. Campano and Simon (2010) point out that there are multiple versions of practitioner research and therefore a breadth of literature. In the following sections I will explore some of the nuances within the practitioner research movement, and how they connect to my research.

**Practitioner Research**

Different people in the field of practitioner research use different terms to describe research conducted by educational practitioners and define these terms in different ways. These terms include ‘teacher research’, ‘practitioner inquiry’, and ‘practitioner research’. Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle were among the first scholars to write about research by teachers as an emerging and legitimate genre in the U.S. In their seminal book, Inside/Outside: Teacher Research and Knowledge Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) used the term ‘teacher research’ and provided a working definition by calling it “systematic and intentional inquiry by teachers” (p.3). They defined ‘systematic’ as “ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences inside and outside of classrooms, and making some kind of written record”. Moreover, they defined ‘intentional’ as “an activity that is planned rather than spontaneous” (p.3). Finally, for Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) ‘inquiry’ is characterized as research that “stems from or generates questions and reflects teachers’ desires to make sense of their experiences—to adopt a learning stance or openness toward classroom life” (p.3). Nine years later, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) again used the term ‘teacher research’ but this time broadened the definition “to encompass all forms of practitioner inquiry that involve systematic, intentional, and self-critical inquiry about one’s work…” They further specified that the definition included inquiries that “others may refer to as action research, practitioner inquiry, teacher inquiry, teacher and teacher educator self-study, and so on” (p. 22).
Other authors have also adopted a similar approach. For instance, Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes (2008) used ‘practitioner research’ as an umbrella term for ‘action research, participatory research, self-study, and teacher research’ (p. 5). On the other hand, Craig (2009) treated teacher research as the umbrella term within which to locate other terms such as practitioner inquiry and action research, describing teacher research as research conducted by “university researchers and/or teachers themselves [as] a form on inquiry approached from the teacher perspective” (p. 61).

Zeichner (2007), while identifying ‘self-study research’ as a form of ‘practitioner inquiry’, preferred to use ‘self-study research’ again as an umbrella term for “several of the practitioner research traditions…including action research, participatory research, and scholarship of teaching” (p. 44, Endnotes 2 & 6). Zeichner (2009) shows a preference for ‘action research’ as an umbrella term and uses it “in a very broad sense as a systematic inquiry by practitioners about their own practices” (p. 69). Zeichner elaborates:

I use the term action research in a broad way to include forms of practitioner inquiry that do not necessarily follow the classic action research spiral. In recent years, a variety of different approaches to practitioner inquiry, including action research, participatory action research, critical practitioner inquiry, critical participatory action research, lesson study, the scholarship of teaching, teacher research, and self-study…have been used in teacher education programs. My focus is on all of these forms of practitioner inquiry. (p. 86).

In other instances, practitioner-researchers may locate themselves within one of its genres, while at the same time drawing clear distinctions between their research and other forms of practitioner research. For instance, Valli and Price (2000) ‘consciously’ identified their collaborative research as teacher educators as ‘action research’. In so doing, they separated their work from teacher research and classroom research by using the term ‘action research’ to forefront their “interest in social and political change derived from critical traditions as well as in individual change” (p. 57).

Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen (1994) stated their preference for using the term ‘practitioner research’ in place of ‘action research’ was for “pragmatic and philosophical reasons” (p.2). Specifically, they chose the term to avoid cluttering the field further with “new and confusing terms,” and because the term practitioner research seemed to be the “emerging term of choice in
North America” (p. 2). They located practitioners in the heart of practitioner research and provided a “working definition” of practitioner research by describing it as “insider research done by practitioners…using their own site…as the focus of their study…a reflective process…deliberately and systematically undertaken” (p. 2). Anderson and Herr (1999) use the term practitioner research and action research interchangeably.

The shifts and evolution of scholars’ positionality vis-à-vis the terminology that is used when describing research by educational practitioners can be challenging. Should we call it practitioner research or practitioner inquiry? Should we use the terms interchangeably? Is all practitioner research and inquiry action research or self-study, or are action research and self-study two of the many traditions of practitioner research and inquiry? Similarly, is it best to describe the types of research as ‘traditions’, or are they versions, variations, genres, and so forth. Fortunately, there is greater consensus in the field about the different kinds of research done by practitioners on their own teaching as well as common characteristics that cut across these different traditions. I identify my own research as critical practitioner research. My choice of including the word critical stems from my investigation of the power relations and dynamics that existed in the collaboration between the university and community partners.

In the following sections I identify elements of different kinds of practitioner research that inform my work. As mentioned previously, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe action research, teacher research, self-study, the scholarship of teaching and learning, and the use of practice as a site for research as “the major genres and versions of practitioner research” (p. 39). They identify certain qualitative methodologies, such as narrative inquiry employed by teachers and teacher educators to understand their own practices, as “traditional modes of research” (p. 44) . However, they also state that practitioner-researchers are different from traditional qualitative researchers since “in addition to documenting classroom practice and students’ learning, they also systematically document from the inside perspective their own questions, interpretive frameworks, changes in views over time, dilemmas, and recurring themes” (p. 44).
Mapping the Field

Action Research

Action research has sometimes been used as an umbrella term for all forms of research by educational practitioners, and at other times interchangeably with ‘practitioner research’ and ‘practitioner inquiry’. Perhaps this confusion can be explained by the historical context of the first instances of research by teachers being called ‘action research.’ Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) used the term action research in their book to “denote insiders doing research in their own settings” (p. 4). My study of Teach for Change is such an example of insider research

Valli and Price (2000) see action research as a form of praxis in which knowledge is used for purposeful action. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe action researchers’ efforts being centred “on altering curriculum, challenging common school practices, and working for social change by engaging in a continuous process of problem posing, data gathering, analysis, and action” (p. 40). In my study, the problem posed is centred around the nature of the partnership in Teach for Change and how productive the partnership is for each community organization.

Teacher Research.

Different scholars look at ‘teacher research’ differently, some giving the term broad definitions (e.g., Borg 2009; Craig 2009), while others providing more narrow or specific descriptions. Borg (2009), for instance, describes teacher research broadly as “systematic, rigorous enquiry by teachers into their own professional contexts, which is made public” (p. 377). In my study the professional context is my liaison work in the Teach for Change program.

Self-Study.

Practitioner researchers who examine their own practices and base their research on the “postmodernist assumption that it is never possible to divorce the ‘self’ either from the research process of from educational practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 40) often use the term ‘self-study’ for their research (see, Loughran, 2004). ‘Self-study’ practitioner research has
usually been located in teacher education programs and the practices of teacher educators (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Zeichner, 2007). Unlike action research, where the emphasis is on action or transformation, in self-study research the ‘self’ (in other words, the practitioner) is the focus of the study (Samaras & Freese, 2009, p. 5). Within this study, there are elements of both action research and self-study, specifically, I engaged in action research when researching the community-university partnership and engaged in self-study in my analysis of my practice as program liaison.

Using Teaching as Site for Research.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe research from a teaching site as a genre of research “carried out by university-based researchers who take on the role of teacher in K-12 settings for a specific period of time in order to conduct research on the intricate complexities involved in theorizing and working out problems of practice” (p. 40). There are many instances of university-based instructors and researchers choosing to use K-12 teaching as a site of research (e.g., Peercy, 2013; Russell, 1993; Vansledright, 2002). In the case of my study, the site of research was a community based education program, rather than a setting that involved K-12 education

Reflective Practice.

The term ‘reflective practitioner’ was introduced in 1983 by Donald Schön in his book by the same title. Schön (1983) wrote primarily for the medical profession, but his ideas have since been taken up by practitioners from many fields. In education, reflective practitioners find ways to study their own instructional contexts with the aim to improve their understanding and to enable them to theorize their own practices. In Chapter Five, I examine some of the ways I locate my study in the reflective practice context.

Narrative Inquiry.

Narrative inquiry has been described as a methodology used by teachers and teacher educators to study and improve their own practices. Clandinin, Pushor, and Orr, 2007 define narrative inquiry as a “deliberative research process founded on a set of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that are at play from the first narrative imaginings of a research puzzle through to the presentation of the narrative inquiry in research text” (p. 33). As mentioned
earlier, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) view narrative inquiry as a traditional mode of research and draw distinctions between narrative inquiry and practitioner inquiry. There are many instances when individuals simply identify themselves as practitioner-researchers and employ a traditional qualitative or quantitative procedures to carry out systematic and intentional research that informs their own practice and also serves to inform the practitioner community at large (e.g., Turner, 2007).

Practitioner Research

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) have suggested that teacher research be seen as “its own genre, not entirely different from other types of systematic inquiry into teaching, yet with some distinctive features” (p.10). In their most recent work on practitioner research and inquiry, Cochran-Smith and Lytle list eight salient characteristics that most forms of practitioner-researcher can be seen as sharing. These include:

1) Practitioner as researcher: In practitioner research, the researcher is the practitioner, and the practitioner is the researcher. These two roles are combined into one person, who is also the insider in the research and instructional context.

2) Community and collaboration: In most forms of practitioner research, participants collaborate within and across the communities of practice and inquiry. The communities, in turn, become contexts for initial sharing of research knowledge and critical feedback.

3) Knowledge, knowers, and knowing: Practitioner research works on the assumptions that practitioners are legitimate ‘knowers’ who generate knowledge that is directly applicable to their local contexts, and can also “function as public knowledge by informing practice and policy beyond the immediate context” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 42).

4) Professional context as inquiry site and/or professional practice as focus of study: As Cochran-Smith and Lytle point out, when teachers conduct research on their own teaching and/or in their own instructional contexts, they create knowledge that is distinct from knowledge created by outsiders studying the same contexts. The questions that practitioner-researchers explore emerge from “from neither theory nor practice alone but from critical reflection on the intersections of the two” (p. 42).

5) Blurred boundaries between inquiry and practice: Practitioner researchers often find the boundaries between practice and research getting blurred by the nature of their work. The
authors indicate that the blurring of the two roles of ‘practitioner’ and ‘researcher’ is often accompanied by tensions, dilemma, and problems. I explore this aspect of practitioner research in more detail in Chapter Four.

6) Validity and generalizability: An interesting feature across many forms of practitioner research is that the researchers often look at validity and generalizability in ways that are different from traditional and academic research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Some replace validity with trustworthiness and generalizability with transferability. Others present alternatives to assessing quality of research that are more responsive to their unique research contexts.

7) Systematicity and intentionality: Cochran-Smith and Lytle emphasize the need for practitioner research to be systematic and intentional, and use this criteria to separate practitioner research from other kinds of practitioner inquiries. They also indicate that the frameworks of analysis and forms of data that result from systematic and intentional practitioner research are often different from those found in traditional research.

8) Publicity, public knowledge, and critique: Practitioner research, while being local, is often also aimed at being made public and accessible to populations beyond the immediate. Many scholars, in fact, place a lot of importance on the need for practitioner-researchers to make their knowledge public in ways that are accessible to the larger community of academia. An additional characteristic of practitioner research is that the personal and the professional often intermingle in its many forms.

By placing themselves at the centre/core of their research, many practitioners bring in their personal perspectives and experiences into their professional practice. Further, such practitioner-researchers who consciously strive to connect theory with practice cannot help but bring in the personal to the professional to conduct practitioner research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Since there exists no blueprint for doing such research, practitioner researchers adopt and adapt traditional modes of inquiry, both qualitative and quantitative, to best inform their own research practices. In my own practice, I use practice/teaching as site of research as well as some aspects of reflective practice and self study. Practitioner researchers contend with many challenges that arise from their roles. They often aim to change and transform, and in turn find their work transformative for themselves. In so doing, practitioner researchers often push the boundaries of
traditional perceptions about researchers and participants. Further, there are many players in the field of education who could come under the umbrella of practitioners. These include teachers, teacher educators, student teachers, school principals, teacher educators, community college instructors, university faculty members, adult literacy program tutors, fieldwork supervisors, school district superintendents, and so forth. Additionally, in exploratory practice (Allwright, 2005), learners are also seen as fellow researchers and practitioners. Similarly, in other versions of practitioner inquiry, such as participatory action research, ‘researchers’ may include participants “who are not practitioners in the professional sense but rather are significant” (Goswami & Rutherford, 2009).

It is important to note that despite traditional notions of the divide between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched’, the roles of practitioner and researcher are not always mutually exclusive. For instance, Zeichner and Noffke (2001) acknowledge themselves as practitioner-researchers identifying their roles as “teachers, teacher educators, and facilitators of the practitioner research of others” (p.300). Likewise, Cochran-Smith (2005) identified herself and her ‘long-term colleague and co-author’ Susan Lytle as teacher educators who function simultaneously as both researcher and practitioner, and indeed sees the role of teacher educators as “working the dialectic of inquiry and practice” (p. 219). I functioned both as a researcher and a practitioner in my role as program liaison.

Practitioner research has thus emerged as a ‘theoretical hybrid’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 93) from a very long “ideological, multinational, and sociocultural history of efforts by educators to document, understand, and alter practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004, p. 605). Therefore, the result has been many variations both within and across traditions of practitioner-led research and inquiry. Even as these variations create new tensions and dilemmas, the resulting dynamism and theoretical hybridism (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) is taking educational research in new directions. Indeed, one can see innovative theories, epistemologies, and methodologies embedded in the research conducted by practitioners in and on their own instructional contexts.

Critiques
Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) list a number of critiques offered in the literature about practitioner research in terms of knowledge generated, methods employed, questions about ethics, the political and ideological purposes, and the blurring of the personal and the professional. Broadly, there exists skepticism about whether practitioner research is ‘research’. Small scale and short-term individual practitioner studies have been criticized for not being able to offer cross-cutting solutions and generalizations, and those reviewing the studies have expressed frustration with the difficulty in gathering a cumulative meaning from these studies. It is debatable, however, whether practitioner research should be seen as lacking in generalizability if tools and techniques for doing meta-analyses do not currently exist. In other words, the limited generalizability of such research can be seen as a limitation on the part of the synthesizers and meta-analyzers, rather than a weakness in the bodies of research they look at.

Concerns have also been raised about how teachers may struggle with donning the mantle of researchers. Zeichner & Noffke (2001), for instance, mention “concerns that the demands of teachers’ jobs make it difficult for them to find time to do research and that, when they do so, their attention is drawn away from their main task of educating students” (p. 299). However, hopefully as practitioner research gains currency among practitioners, an increasing number of teachers and other practitioners will theorize and publicize their work and thus bring additional momentum and energy into this already dynamic field.

There are often concerns about practitioner studies becoming narcissistic exercises in justifying current practices by practitioners. However, such concerns can be addressed by instances of practitioner research where practitioners use their research to refine their teaching, explore problems and complexities that might have been left unexplored otherwise, and deepen their understanding of their craft and student learning as well as make their work available for public review. However, many of these critiques are based in a positivist view of reality (Zeichner & Noffke, 2001, p. 299) and fail to acknowledge the complexities of actual teaching processes that interpretative or situated research captures, explores, and illustrates.

Many practitioner-researchers face double biases of having limited funding and conducting studies on their own with little outside help and support on one hand, and having to defend the legitimacy and quality of their work on the other. Some practitioner-researchers find creative
solutions, such as forming communities of inquiry and joining forces with like-minded individuals to collaborate and generate knowledge. Others when reporting their studies may choose not to provide detailed and explicit descriptions of their methods of data collection and analysis since they are more focused on their own learning and sharing this learning in a local setting. Unfortunately, sometimes the lack of detail in practitioner research reports is inferred as lack of depth and rigor in the research itself, and the different purposes in reporting are not always taken into account.

Practitioner research challenges the idea that practitioners are the subordinate element in the scholar/practitioner dichotomy. The knowledge produced by practitioners through research and inquiry helps address the practice and theory gap. Also, practitioner research helps bring focus on the practitioner as researcher in the research, thereby making the usually invisible researcher visible. This visibility complements and balances the emphasis that is often placed on participants and methodology in research, a characteristic that is sometimes absent in traditional academic research.

Practitioners who study their own practice under the umbrella of practitioner research do so with a heightened awareness of who they are and the rationale for their research. They are invested in this type of research for dual reasons and “take their work seriously, self-consciously posing questions and then investigating those questions by gathering and analyzing the data of practice” (Hollins & Guzman, 2005, p. 510). Further, practitioners often bring insider and expert knowledge to their research that outsider researchers can strive for but not necessarily attain (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009).

Practitioner research offers practitioners the opportunity to engage in self-directed professional development to balance the traditional models of professional growth, where an outsider comes into the instructional setting and shares information. For academicians who value research and teaching equally, combining the two in ways where one directly informs the other could be an effective, practical, and meaningful activity. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), for instance, point out to the potential of teacher research for ‘transforming’ the university-generated knowledge base. They suggest,
Just as critical scholarship has challenged many of the norms of interpretive social science, teacher research makes problematic in a different way the relationships of researcher and researched, theory and practice, knower and knowledge, process and product. When teachers do research, the gap between researchers and researched is narrowed. Notions of research subjectivity and objectivity are redefined: Subjective and local knowing rather than objectified and distanced “truth” is the goal. (p. 58)

My Practice

I began to research my site of practice right from the beginning of the development of the Teach for Change program, but not in a manner necessarily aligned with critical practitioner research. Originally, I was brought into the Teach for Change Program to assess the strengths and limitations of the program. When I began my research, I felt myself to be an observer, not a participant in the inquiry. This initial positioning was not because I desired distance or separation, but because I did not realize that the work I was doing with the program allowed me an ‘insider’ perspective. I saw my position as incidental, rather than important. Originally, I saw my research within the program as being essentially a study of possible institutional/societal change, insofar as my role at that point seem to be of a researcher contemplating what changes could occur in society or in education if teacher candidates incorporated critical and anti-oppressive frameworks into their practice on a broader scale. However, over time I came to recognize the significance/importance of the ‘individual/local’ consequences of working through critical/anti-oppressive frameworks, and not just for the teacher candidates, but for myself as well.

Data Sources and Types

In this section, I describe how I collected, analysed and wrote about my data. There were four data sources in my research: the community partners, the Teach for Change program, the program liaison, and the community-university partnership. To collect data from the community partners I used participant observations at Teach for Change committee meetings, workshops, and reflection and discussion sessions. Most significantly, I conducted one-on-one interviews with the community members. I collected data from the Teach for Change program by reviewing the documents that were generated by the committee and the program’s participants as well as
from my own field notes, taken during the program’s workshops and events. My own data (as the program liaison) was generated from my practitioner-researcher journal, as well as my field notes.

Community partner observations

In the first year (2013) during steering committee meetings, I focused on being a participant observer. I identified with what Mills (2003, p. 54) calls an “active participant observer,” a research who is fully engaged in the task that is being researched. While the project was underway, I was totally engrossed in the task at hand and it was usually not until after the meetings that I was able to put on my researcher hat.

Early on, I realized that I needed to use a journal to document my experience of the research process. In my journaling I attempted to document my experience as practitioner researcher who has worked with the committee members to design the program and has done some of the same activities as the program participants. My participation in workshops was a particularly rich area for me to explore in my journal. I had, on the one hand, been involved in the development of some of the workshop programming, but on the other hand, when I participated in the activities I was on the opposite side exploring how my practice is informed by theoretical frameworks explored in the workshops. Because I often found myself in the role of active ‘participant’ I suggest that the data in these situations was generated naturally, as opposed to structurally. Rich discussion occurred in these settings and the manner in which the discussions were analyzed and processed tended to be quite organic. As a result, the documents and ‘artifacts’ (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009) from these sessions were produced as a normal part/outcome of community teaching and learning, not as intentional research data.

Interviews

I conducted one on one interviews with each community member of Teach for Change as the second year of the program (2014/15) drew to a close. I could have done an additional interview in the middle of this two year time period project, but for several reasons this seemed unnecessary. First, I was in conversation with participants in many other ways throughout the
two year period, both at meetings and online between meetings. In my first year as an intern and then in the second year as program liaison, I was also fully engaged in almost all aspects of the program. I believe I was able to get a sense of the natural development of the committee dynamics in my roles as program intern and later liaison through our meetings, workshops, reflections and discussions sessions, emails and other forms of communication.

As the program came to a close in 2015, I began to analyze the cache of data I had at my disposal. I had two years worth of email messages, minutes from meetings, correspondence with individual committee members, field notes, journals and interviews. As I read through the documents I identified themes, which I used to develop interview questions, however, I also realized that while the data I collected served as an important framework for my interview questions, it became apparent that the data in its original form (i.e. emails, meeting minutes etc.) did not provide significant purpose on their own. In other words, the data worked as a whole to create themes of discussion, rather than providing individual insight of what was happening within the program, or enriching my analysis of the perspectives of the community partners.

Data Analysis

LeCompte (1999) advise that data analysis should begin well before data collection is complete, which was an approach I followed. I began sorting information into categories and themes as I wrote my reflective journals. Also, I typed notes and excerpts from the meeting minutes and other written forms of communications. LeCompte (2000) says “tidying up” is an essential first step in data analysis. This data ‘tidying’ followed LeCompte’s (2000) suggestion to “make copies, file, catalogue, label, index, identify gaps and collect data to fill it” (p. 148). Once I had a clear idea of what was there and how it all fit together, the analysis and writing began to fall into place. To determine what data to focus on, I looked at issues that occurred frequently in the data. For example, in my research, committee members talked about different strategies for collaboration. Second I looked for “omissions,” or items that did not appear even though I expected them to. For example, I was expecting there would be some discomfort with me being present as a researcher, but found little evidence of this. Third I looked for “declarations,” or items that participants said that were present or significant. On such as issue was that of trust,
specifically the feeling of feeling that they could implicitly trust one another even when agreement was not always possible.

I came to the project as a graduate student, not as a community educator. As I have worked through the data analysis and writing, I became more and more of an insider. Throughout my time as liaison, I continued to work on my dissertation, doing both academic work and practitioner work as the program liaison. On this point Justine Mercer’s (2007) description of the insider position as being between two “poles of a continuum which is more or less fluid, depending on the way the end points are conceptualized” (p. 7) feels particularly poignant. With my background, I considered myself to be sliding back and forth somewhere in the middle of that continuum, but I usually felt closer to the practitioner end. This is a complex issue to wrestle with as I entered the world of critical practitioner research from an academic, not a practitioner background. In many ways it has been incredibly freeing to explore my site of practice outside of how it may be framed by traditional academic theoretical frameworks.

My insider study of a community-university collaboration has entailed a great deal of studying up on the well-established hierarchies of status and power within the university and the education system. While I was an insider in this project, I was not sharing the experience of the community educators in the Teach for Change project. I was the program liaison and as such had a site of practice, but I did not conduct actual community education workshops or work in community education programming. Therefore, my role was distinct from, but still an integral part of the Teach for Change program.

Another important issue related to insider research is that the community educators I am writing about are a large segment of my audience, and so I needed to pay attention to language. Academic literature often includes abstract theoretical language that takes some time to unpack. While an academic might be motivated to do this work, community educators often feel that their time would be better spent elsewhere. If I did not write in a way that includes them, they will look for other things to read.
Paulo Freire (1970) makes the point in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, that all too often, educators and politicians speak and are not understood because their language is not attuned to the concrete situation of the people they address. Accordingly, their talk is just alienated and alienating rhetoric (Freire, 1970, p. 78), bell hooks (1994) suggests that, “Any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public” (p. 64), and that theory is not able to transform if it is not directed at daily life. Similarly, William Tierney (2000) urges academics to “develop an intellectual style of writing that engages the broad public” (p. 190), and to present research findings in a style that is more accessible and engaging.

Ensuring Ethicality in My Practitioner Research

While designing my practitioner research study and carrying it out, I wanted to make sure that it was as ethical as possible. I was aware of the power relations that existed between myself and the community members as I was listening to their perspectives and using them in my research. While this does not mean I was in a more powerful position, it does mean I have a certain amount of power in how they are represented. I struggled with this possible conflict because the reason why I engaged in this practitioner dissertation in the first place was because I wanted to promote the voices of community members that often go underrepresented in community-university partnerships. I wanted to make sure that I would not lose sight of this important foundational goal. Therefore, all the decisions I took and the choices I made were directed towards ensuring that I did not prioritize data generation and collection over my liaison position and the collegial relationship I had with the community members. I tried to ensure that my research was ethical not only in terms of what I chose to do, but also what I chose not to do.

As a doctoral student at a University, I am required to take informed consent from all participants for agreeing to participate in my study. I had to ensure that the committee members felt comfortable being audio recorded, but I also honoured any request made to stop recording, or to edit if any comments were inadvertently made that someone later wished to be struck from the record. These were spaces where I brought in my knowledge of research practices. Similarly, there were times when I brought in knowledge from my practice as program liaison to inform my
research – knowledge that gave me a far more nuanced approach on how to approach the data I had collected.

Multimembership

Wenger (1998) calls the transferring of some element of one practice into another as a result of one’s multimembership in two communities of practice brokering (p. 109). According to Wenger, brokers span boundaries, link communities of practice, and sustain an identity across the boundaries (p. 154). In analyzing my work as a practitioner-researcher alongside my role as program liaison I can identify elements of brokering in what I did, especially in terms of transferring research practices into my liaison role and liaison practices into research. However, in positioning myself as a novice researcher and relatively novice community program liaison in my practitioner dissertation, I also do not quite fit into the definition of a broker as Wenger defines the term. For instance, Wenger notes that, brokers must often avoid two opposite tendencies: being pulled in to become full members and being rejected as intruders. Indeed, their contributions lie precisely in being neither in nor out. (p. 110)

Wenger’s (1998) vision of a broker who spans boundaries and connects different communities of practice, therefore, is of someone who is on a boundary trajectory (p. 154) that will never lead to full membership into any one community of practice. Therefore, even as I recognize elements of brokering in my practitioner research study, I problematize the idea that I could be seen as a ‘broker’. As I explain in Chapter Five, I see myself on multiple trajectories: an inbound trajectory in community education work; a peripheral trajectory in the community of research; and currently a boundary trajectory in terms of my peripheral participation in both research and liaison work with an emphasis on linking the two communities of practice through my practitioner inquiry. I exemplify what Wenger writes about multiple trajectories: “As we go through a succession of forms of participation, our identities form trajectories, both within and across communities of practice (p. 154).”

In taking an approach that integrated research and community liaison work, I also see myself as ‘working the dialectic’ of inquiry and teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005, p. 219). In simultaneously taking on the roles of both researcher and practitioner, I believe I am exploring the “reciprocal, recursive, and symbiotic relationship” between inquiry and practice, where the
“activities and the roles are integrated and dynamic” (p. 94). In the following chapters, I abide by the definition of practitioner research as systematic and intentional inquiry made public (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). In the larger context of my practitioner dissertation, I identified a basic area of overlap between the two praxes of practice and research: that of inquiry. I believe that by engaging in practitioner research, I was able to identify inquiry as an element that is common to both community education work and research. In research, inquiry is visualized as being part of the research process of data generation, collection, and analysis aimed towards finding an answer to the research question(s) generally intended for public use. In community education work, inquiry is seen as something that community educators engage in on a regular basis arising from the ground realities of their immediate local practice.

With inquiry as my stance, my role as program liaison in a community education program became more systematic and structured. Recording my work and the work of others allowed me to revisit the various sites of community education practice and keep the lessons learned there fresh in my mind. Taking an integrated approach to practitioner research provided the impetus for exploring ways to innovatively inform community education spaces. I kept records of everything in a way that tied in with my role as liaison meaningfully. This allowed me to stay motivated and made the process relevant to myself in real-time.

Although integrating research and community liaison work in my dissertation work specifically was of immediate relevance, it also has implications for the field of practitioner research in general. Cochran-Smith and Donnell (2006) state that “Some scholars have made the argument…that the knowledge generated through practitioner inquiry may also be useful more publicly and generally in that it suggests new insights into the domains of research on teaching” (p. 512). They further state that “a hallmark of many forms of practitioner inquiry is the invention of new ways to store, retrieve, code, and disseminate practitioners’ inquiries…in the form of…electronic innovations…” (p. 512). It is my hope that by sharing my research, I will be able to provide a case study to fellow community educators and practitioner researchers who may wish to engage in a similar integrated approach to community education programs and research.
Finally, I also would like to demonstrate how practitioner inquiry need not cease with the end of a specific project (in this case my dissertation). The original intent of my dissertation was to limit my investigation to the Teach for Change program. As I progressed through my practitioner research journey, I began to reflect on the idea that when a practitioner adopts an ‘inquiry (as) stance’ (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009d; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009), the inquiry does not end with the project. It becomes a habit of mind and an ongoing process, where the practitioner-researcher continues to engage in multiple inquiries that can evolve into various individual research projects.

I left Teach for Change in April of 2016 to take on a new position with an Ontario elementary school board. It was a decision motivated by both a desire to pursue a new opportunity, and also the belief that I had contributed as much as I could to the program, and that it was time for a new liaison to take over. I continued to adopt inquiry as stance in my work with the school board, and it allowed me to explore important developments that occurred in my practice in my new position. I am now moving onto a new role as a school-university liaison for a U.K. Education program that works to facilitate university accesses for students from marginalized communities. I will have further opportunities to engage in, and research the partnerships being developed between universities and school/community organizations to address educational inequality.

In this Chapter I explored the complexities and nuances of Practitioner Research, and attempted to locate my own critical practitioner research within this vibrant and often radical methodology. In Chapter Four, I further attempt to explore how my critical practitioner methodology shaped my collaboration with the Teach for Change community partners.
Chapter 4:
Analysis and Findings: Perspectives of the Community Education Partners

This thesis was undertaken with a belief that the voices and perspectives of community partners are under-represented and even absent in, community-university partnership literature. As I began my research and found the absence of those perspectives, I hoped that my research might provide accounts of community partners’ knowledge, professionalism and identity in ways that would illuminate some of the questions being raised around these constructs in the literature. I had noted that research literatures frequently reported on community partners’ views, but rarely gave priority to these opinions. I hoped as this research began that by prioritizing the community partners’ perspectives, new understandings could be generated.

As I began to explore the Teach for Change community-university partnership I realized that the impact of this partnership on the community partners seemed to be significant but diffused; they talked about being energised by the partnership but were not always clear about its impact on their own work; they felt ‘changed’ by being involved, but found it difficult to explain how; they were enthusiastic about continuing but could not always point to ways to any ways in which to go forward. Given some of the marked contradictions, I was curious to explore with the community partners what the collaboration meant and what its ‘point’ was for them. I wanted to give them a context to develop their perspectives in meaningful ways, and thus support them in presenting the community perspectives missing from the literature.

The main research question I posed in this study asked the community partners for their perspectives on, and experiences of, developing a social justice education program in collaboration with a university partner. This included identifying the benefits/tensions of the partnership. The community partners were also asked for suggestions if it was identified as an issue, for improving the collaboration process.

In this chapter, I present the perspectives of the community partners involved in the Teach for Change program. I also present the findings based on these perspectives. The findings are an account of what this type of partnership provides for community education organizations as well
as an overview of the important contribution community education organizations can play in providing educational opportunities in their respective communities.

**Community Partners’ Perspectives**

The community partners’ perspectives, are the lynchpin of my research. I was interested in their experiences and their constructions of some of the key areas investigated in academic literature. It is, therefore, a particular concern to explore the ways in which the community partners’ perspectives (mis)align with some of the claims of the academic literature. Community partners’ perspectives were, therefore, the dimension by which my research data was gathered and through which my findings were interpreted.

In understanding the term ‘community perspective’, I drew on three major constructs. The first construct was that of authenticity. At one level, this refers to the notion of representation. Thus, Goodson’s (1991) claim that community partner’s perspective’ has been used selectively within research,

The second construct of perspective that I reference is located in the notion of voice as used by Elbaz (1991), and links with the previous notion of discourse – both themes that, as will be seen later in the thesis, becomes a central concern. It is the claiming of both right to ‘speak’ and the expectation of being heard, that Elbaz (1991) explains,

> having ‘voice’ implies that one has a language in which to give expression to one’s authentic concerns, that one is able to recognize those concerns, and further that there is an audience of significant others who will listen. … voice is already there, already critical, regardless of whether the outside world allows it expression (p. 10).

The right of community educations partners to have a discourse, and crucially to be heard by those shaping education, is a principle that informs practitioner research. Elbaz’s belief that voice is “already there, already critical” positions practitioner research as powerful in its potential to offer a language or a discourse, to community partners.

Thirdly, perspective is located in Freire’s (2000), notion of voice as political, a “right to participate consciously in the socio-historical transformation of . . . society” (p. 13). Freire states
that in this sense, voice is a “primordial human right” (p. 12), and where voice is denied, people are “alienated from the power responsible for their silence” (p. 13). The themes of power are significant in this thesis, and indeed created an imperative to design my research in ways that I had not at first anticipated.

The curious absence of community partners’ perspectives/voices struck me in my own literature searches. Although there were books, chapters, articles and websites which addressed my research topic of community-university collaborations, the seminal texts were the voice of the academic or the professional researcher. Indeed, none of these texts actually gave precedence to the community partner voice.

My own research, however, was focused on finding those perspectives. I wanted to know what the community partners could tell me about collaboration and to do so in the context of practitioner research. I sought, therefore, to address the ‘curious absence’ of community partners’ perspectives by positioning them centrally in my research. Only through their perspectives could I hope to discover what collaboration actually meant to them; if I wanted to know whether practitioner research was important in any way to the community partners, it was their perspectives I needed to hear. My decision, therefore, was that this thesis should position community partners’ voices as ‘strongly present’ rather than ‘curiously absent’. Part of the claim to original knowledge in this thesis is thus based on representing the perspectives and voices of the community partners as the prime and defining mechanism for investigating my research questions. An unexpected outcome, indeed a dominant theme, is that the community partner voices segued into the notion of discourse, that is the importance of being able to speak and of being heard.

The Right to Speak and be Heard

Language and discourse are critical areas for this research. If, as is claimed, community partners are disenfranchised by the act of restricting access to certain critical discourses, severe ramifications for representation of their voice in ways other than through ‘approved’ discourses are likely (Elbaz, 1991). Since, my research is based on a series of interviews that required the
community partners to voice their perspectives, the impact of any “limitation of articulation” (Elbaz, 1991, p. 13) would have been an issue.

My research is not based on any idea of objectivism, in that the essential belief I hold is that meaning is created and shaped by individuals and interactions between individuals. As Crotty (2005) suggests,

… [it is] the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and transmitted within an essentially social context. (Crotty, 2005, p. 42: italics author’s own)

The research participants are viewed as “helping to construct the ‘reality’ with the researchers” (Robson, 2002, p. 27). However, as indicated earlier, I also wanted to bring a particular lens to examine constructivism – that of critical inquiry.

The commitment of this study was to gain an understanding of these events through the ‘eyes of the participants, that is the community partners, “Reality is never simply the ‘objective datum’ but it is also people’s perception of it” (Freire, 2005, p. 15). This perspective constitutes the lens of enquiry and informs the interpretation that operates to reveal both the position I had as researcher and the narrative structures that I constructed. In seeking integrity of design and reporting, it was therefore important to explain clearly the perspectives adopted:

Inevitably, we bring a number of assumptions to our chosen methodology. We need, as best as we can, to state what these assumptions are. This is precisely what we do when we elaborate our theoretical perspective. Such an elaboration is a statement of the assumptions brought to the research task and reflected in the methodology as we understand and employ it … that is, our view of the human world and social life within that world... (Crotty, 2005, p. 7)

My methodological and theoretical positioning resonates with self as researcher as a legitimated position, with an emphasis not on the (unsustainable) position of achieving neutrality, but rather on ensuring transparency of decision-making processes and making explicit, insofar as it is achievable, the impact of myself as researcher on the data collection and analysis. Indeed, as Crotty (2005) states, “We construct meaning’, and inevitably, ‘we’ includes the researcher, whose very decision-making process of focus and approaches to data collection and analysis has already acted to represent the world selectively, and as such, shaped any meaning emerging” (p. 44). My use of interviewing included actively acknowledging my method, which inevitably
involved my role in interpretation. However, in that I sought to represent the authentic perspectives of the community partners, my interviewing strategies had to be designed in ways that would allow the partners the maximum opportunity to ensure that their perspectives were present.

The Interviews

Perhaps the greatest contributory factor to the selection of interview as a method was to be found in the fact that the community partner perspectives are central to this research. As such, the opportunity to directly discuss the community partners’ perspectives was an imperative, and interviews were the most suitable medium for capturing them. As Kvale (1996) states, “interviews are: … attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world…” (p. 13).

However, this statement also draws attention to a dimension of this research which has been both acknowledged at one level, but remains unspoken at another: that of power. It is true to say that issues of power interweave themselves throughout this thesis. For example, the notion that practitioner research is in itself an act of empowerment as it reveals the ideology of control over knowledge, how knowledge is generated, what counts as knowledge and to whom, and how knowledge is used and evaluated (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). This of course includes the power relations that reside in research, and specifically in the case of this thesis within the interviews. Kvale (1996) claims, “…the power dynamics in research interviews, and potential oppressive use of interview-produced knowledge, tend to be left out in literature on qualitative research” (p. 41). The next section turns to considerations of the power dynamics of interviewing.

Interviewing and power dynamics

The first set of power dynamics that can be said to exist are located within the context of the research, that is the Teach for Change program. Teach for Change has an institutional profile,
thus being interviewed by me might well have generated a sense that answers could render participants vulnerable within that environment. It was a possibility that the community partners would seek to protect themselves by masking or modifying any responses likely to be controversial. Although I sought to guard against this defensive response mechanism by providing assurances about anonymity for all aspects of the research evidence of awareness that a power dynamic existed. Indeed, this dynamic was clear when one individual made the comment “I do feel more comfortable saying this now that I have left the program”. Having noted this, however, these statements are also indicative that the community partners were by and large willing to ‘take risks’ in answering the questions with a degree of truth, which could have left them feeling vulnerable.

The second set of power dynamics that relate specifically to this research concerns my own working relationship with the community partners. I had worked with all of the community partners, and as such I wondered if I was more likely to elicit responses which the partners knew would be met with approval (or perhaps the converse in some instances). Certainly, in developing the questions, I was aware that I was occasionally asking about areas which I had previously discussed with the teachers during supervisions. Indeed, some acknowledged this in their replies, saying, ‘Ah yes, we’ve talked about this before haven’t we?’ I managed this situation to some extent by prefacing all interviews by saying that I was genuinely interested to hear what they had to say because I did not have answers to the questions I asked. Moreover, in my previous working relationships with community partners I had always been scrupulous about presenting my research as an act of shared exploration of an area, and I ensured that I always acknowledged the legitimacy of their views. The answers I received in interviews were reassuring. For example, two partners responses noted, ‘Well, we have disagreed on this in the past’ or ‘I know what you think on this and you know I don’t see it that way’. Despite this, I would contend that all research responses are potentially open to distortion (Robson, 2002) and that interviews do at least offer the potentiality of ‘reading’ the person rather than only their words (Thomas, 2009).
A third set of power dynamics relates to the use of and access to the knowledge gained through interviewing (Burgess, 1989) – that is, who owns, and who ascribes meaning to that data. The interviewer has an ethical responsibility to ensure that the transcribed tapes are accurate, and therefore the ethical position is to return and check the tapes with the community partners for accuracy, which I did. Nevertheless, data gained in this way cannot be subject to change after the event by the interviewee. I set out to check that the community partners were still content with their interviews being used, and in that sense, ensured they still felt ownership for their data. However, it was unlikely that any partner would withdraw their interview transcript at this stage. Ethically, I also offered the partners full access to all or any part of my writing up of their interviews in this thesis. Again, the partners were aware of the purpose and potential audience of their interviews. However, what could not be negotiable was that I ‘own’ the writing up of the materials, the interpretation of findings, and ultimately, the dissemination of those data. To this extent then, the power dynamic of data analysis and dissemination still exists.

Validity and reliability in interviews

As indicated earlier, validity and reliability in qualitative research are central but debated constructs. Following Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007) directive that validity and reliability are attainable in qualitative research only by paying attention to those issues throughout the research, I want to consider those constructs here. Given that interviewing was the major method of data collection throughout this research, I agreed with Cohen, Manion & Morisson (2007) that ‘Perhaps the most practical way of achieving greater validity [was] to minimize the amount of bias as much as possible’ (p.150).

Bias can to be found in both interviewee and interviewer attitudes, conscious or otherwise, towards ‘race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, status, social class and age’ (Lee, 1993; Scheurich, 1995). In some ways, controlling bias as a conscious act can only be achieved through establishing trust relationship. Specifically, as discussed above, trust is established in those interactions in which ‘interviewer effects’ are ameliorated through the collaborative and critical stances taken in practitioner research.
To return to Cohen, Manion & Morrison’s (2007) earlier point, “Threats to validity and reliability can never be erased completely; rather the effects of these threats can be attenuated by attention [to them] throughout a piece of research” (p. 133). By a constant awareness of the issues of validity and reliability and with particular reference to interviewing, I hope clearly to demonstrate that I have attempted to address and control as far as is reasonable the threats presented to the findings of this project.

From the beginning, I intended to use a semi structured approach to interviewing. I wanted to provide prompts to the partners, while at the same time, allowing the partners to further investigate the questions I asked. In allowing for probes and prompts (Robson, 2002), I sought to support the partners in their responses and allow for more in-depth explorations of areas which I felt to be significant for the research. This approach was also beneficial in facilitating transcription and subsequent coding.

The interview questions were divided into three section: the first asked the partners for their perspectives on their collaboration with the university, including how well their needs were recognized and realized: the second question asked the partners why their organizations has chosen to collaborate and what could be done to make the collaboration more successful: and the third question asked the partners to discuss the benefits and tensions that had occurred as a result of the collaboration.

The Community Partners

The one-on-one interviews took place in July 2015 and included Jane, Erin, Ava and Camilla2, who were all part of the Teach for Change steering committee. Camilla and Jane worked for Grassroots, Ava was the executive director with the Centre for Canadian – Jamaican Partnerships (CCJP) and Erin worked with the Centre for Indigenous Teaching and Learning (CITL). The four women had all worked on together previously and were familiar with the mandate of each other’s organizations.

\[2\) names have all been changed for the purpose of confidentiality
Grassroots

Grassroots opened in April, 1990 as a “Learner Centre”. Two development education programs (OXFAM & International Development Education Project) redirected funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA that into the Department of Foreign Affairs in 2013) to create the Centre. Over time, Grassroots developed as a hub for social and environmental justice work in the community. In 1995, Grassroots became a charitable organization, and today is the last remaining Global Education and Resource Centre in Ontario. As a charitable umbrella organization, Grassroots directly supports numerous special projects. These include a community environmental organization, a Summer Environment Camp, Youth Water Conferences, various Youth Engagement Projects/events and most significantly the Centre for Studies in collaboration with the Southern Ontario University’s Environmental Science program.

Grassroots was the lead partner for Teach for Change. It had worked on various initiatives with the university and Camilla, Grassroots’ executive director, had a strong working relationship with Anne³, the liaison for the university. Camilla originally approached the other community partners in the Fall of 2012 to discuss developing a collaborative program with the university. Once she had a strong level of commitment from the other organizations Camilla approached Anne, a professor of education at the university and secured the participation of the university. The first Teach for Change steering committee meeting took place in January 2013.

Jane was the youth outreach co-ordinator for Grassroots from November 3013 until January 2015. She was also working on her Masters degree during this period. Her position as a community youth educator, and a university student, brought an important perspective to the steering committee. Jane now works for an organization that provides funding to local community initiatives.

³ name has been changed
Centre for Canadian – Jamaican Partnerships (CCJP)

CCJP was founded in 1978, with a mandate to educate Canadians about inner city projects in Jamaica. Between 1983 and 2012 CCJP was supported then CIDA, that provided matching funds. CCJP worked in partnership with community organizations and schools in Jamaica to help improve the living circumstances of Jamaican people by fostering self-sustaining programs such as literacy, skills training, community development, health care and institutional strengthening. During the time this research was being carried out, CCJP assisted with funding for seven projects and provided technical and networking support. Working together, the alliance of Canadians and Jamaicans contributed to building the capacities of marginalized women, men and children to work towards self-reliance.

Running a Canadian ‘global education’ program was the second part of CCJP’s mandate. CCJP was a small, community-based organization that benefited from a strong and committed volunteer base. The volunteer base allowed CCJP to develop a range of programing for Canadians to learn about global issues and increase their understanding and involvement in Canadian international co-operation efforts. A key focus of CCJP’s programming was youth engagement. At the time of this research, CCJP had two program areas that focused on youth: Youth Awareness Trips to Jamaica and Empowering Youth for Global Change.

Ava was the Executive Director of the Centre for Canadian – Jamaican Partnerships for ten years. She was also one of the founding members of Grassroots, and worked as their Executive Director in the 1990s. Ava and Camilla had worked together closely in a variety of community initiatives over the past ten years. Ava’s familiarity with Grassroots mandate meant she had a powerful voice in the development and implementation of Teach for Change because she had perhaps the most nuanced understanding of the capacity of the community partners.

Centre for Indigenous Teaching and Learning (CITL)

CITL was founded in the spring of 2010, under the direction of a small group of interested students, professors and community members involved with the Indigenous Environmental Studies (IES) program at the university. The reason for its inception was a strong belief amongst
these individuals in the importance of the work accomplished by the IES program, and the sense that students of a much younger age would benefit tremendously from access to programming that brings together multiple ways of seeing and understanding the world. Specifically, there was an interest in focusing on the central theme of the IES program that brought together Traditional/Indigenous Knowledge and science.

CITL seeks to venture into a very new area of education that blends cultural knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, and scientific ideas and ways of knowing. Initiatives include working to deliver cultural programming, and science, math and technology programming. CITL brings these knowledges together in a way that enables indigenous youth to reconcile the differences between perspectives and provide youth with the tools to enable a critical exploration and discourse of concepts and methodologies within each of them. As this type of programming is new, the staff at CITL are conscious of wanting to build a solid foundation for the program. Indeed, they allowed time for consultation with various partners (communities, students, education workers, Traditional Knowledge holders), and room for adaptation, improvement, and steady growth of their programming.

While CITL is considered to be a community organization, it is affiliated with the university and occupies a complex space in the Teach for Change program. It has a fairly prominent profile at the university, and students who have participated in Teach for Change are usually familiar with CITL before joining the program.

Erin was the program director for CITL between 2012 -2016. She earned her B.Ed. in the University’s Education Department and was familiar with the faculty in the department. She was also quite familiar with the policies and procedures of the university, as she worked in various jobs at the university before taking on the position of program director for CITL. Having provided an overview of the interview methods and described participants’ organizations, the next section illuminates participants’ responses to the research questions.
Interview question one: Describe your perspective on, and experiences of, developing a (social justice education) program in collaboration with a university partner.

From the start, I chose to analyze the interview data thematically. The first research question sparked two major themes of discussion: formality and recognition. The issue of formality centred around how the program was initiated. In our interview Camilla stated that the original idea for Teach for Change emerged out the collective vision that she and Anne had regarding education. She stated, “The idea [for Teach for Change] was really developed through my personal friendship with Anne. That’s how the university became involved, including getting
approval, recognition and some funding from the Chair of the Education Department” (July, 2015).

Camilla stated that she believed that the university lent credibility and structure to the program. Moreover, she saw the partnership as an entry point for the community partners to become recognized in the larger university community. She also credited the partnership with providing her access to other initiatives being developed in the university’s School of Education Department. Camilla believed the university had consistently been supportive of the program, even though there had not been the level of funding that was initially hoped for.

Jane’s perspective on Teach for Change was more critical than Camilla. She was concerned that Teach for Change had emerged out of a personal rather professional relationship. She explained,

> The idea for Teach for Change developed out of a relationship that was personal rather than professional. Because of this, it seems like it developed though a backdoor process. In retrospect, it would probably have been better to have gone through the main channels. Going through due process establishes a program, especially a program linked with an institution. It may have also raised the level of recognition of the program from the beginning. Because the university doesn’t really have a broad recognition of Teach for Change- it still feels like we are on the fringe of the university, which means we have had to work harder to get students and to get recognition (July 2015).

Jane pointed out that the community partners had the expectation that the university should recognize the importance of the program, but the lack of formality meant that the community partners were unable to find the channels needed to communicate the diversity and importance of the program. Nevertheless, Jane saw Teach for Change as an important addition to the university’s Education Program. She stated, “It’s a program that can set the university apart in terms of the opportunities it offers students to explore alternative educational frameworks and theories. However, it’s a program that continues to fly under the university’s radar” (July 2015). Jane suggested that there had to be a university representative (faculty member) who was consistently there, not just Anne who while committed to the program personally, was not necessarily always able to attend all meeting, workshops and program events. The university needed to have a bigger stake in the program and needed to feel and demonstrate more investment.
Erin suggested that in order for the program to really grow, the need to formalize the relationship with the university was essential. She articulated, “At a certain point, with any kind of growth, the resources of the community partners will be maxed out. We need the university to be more formally attached to the program” (July 2015).

Despite the lack of formality in the partnership, Ava saw the partnership as having room to grow and strengthen. Her view was that the experience had been good, and that the university would want to maintain the partnership and even grow it. However, Ava was doubtful that the university would direct any real resources into the program in the future, taking the view that the university would continue to have an arms length approach to the program. Ava suggested that there may be the possibility of developing other community driven programs in partnership with the university.

Ava believed that the community partners’ expectations had been generally realized. She pointed to the fact that the community partners had all been forthcoming with the needs of their organization and the discussions were open and frank. The inability of the program to generate a solid volunteer base for the community organizations was the major ongoing issue for CCJP. Ava pointed out that CCJP was an organization that primarily runs on volunteer engagement. Thus, the expectation was that the students who did their individual placement with CCJP would have become active volunteers, but this had not been the case. As Ava shared,

Building an additional volunteer base has not really happened, but I think this may be due to the fact that the program doesn’t promote this enough…we [CCJP] hoped they [students] would feel inspired to volunteer apart from the Teach for Change hours. Why have we fallen short? I think all the community partners had the similar exceptions about volunteers, but I suppose we may have had unrealistic expectations (July 2015).

When I asked Ava whether this lack of a volunteer base has negatively impacted CCJP, Ava admitted, “Yes, it means we have to consider where we get the most return, could we have done a different project and gotten a better return?” I asked Ava whether this lack of return could alter CCJP’s commitment to the program. Ava suggested that it meant that CCJP would have to decide in the future as to whether it was worthwhile for the organization to stay involved in Teach for Change.
The theme of recognition was the other major theme that emerged related to the first research question. All of the partners admitted that the level of recognition of the program by the university was not as strong as they had hoped it would be as it demonstrated in the words of Jane and Erin below.

Jane: I don’t know that the program is really recognized by the university. It is well thought of by those who do know about it, but there certainly hasn’t been a big push to have it promoted. I think this will become a real issue as time goes on. We can’t get the funding we need if there isn’t a strong enough profile for the program (July 2015).

Erin: I know that other collaborations that CITL has done with the university have received more recognition. It’s too bad because I feel like Teach for Change is just as good as any of those programs. It just hasn’t had the same kind of support from faculty I guess (July 2015).

Erin suggested she saw the main challenge that Teach for Change faced in terms of gaining recognition from the university centered on the program content (social justice education). She wondered if the university was comfortable promoting the social justice mandate. She noted that the other collaborative programming that CITL is involved with is environmentally based and that the university has enthusiastically promoted such programs. Erin suggested that social justice is a grey area, and the university may be less comfortable supporting a program that has the potential to be critical of the types of learning the university promoted.

**Interview question two: Why choose to collaborate?**

Educational partnerships form for a variety of reasons. However, these partnerships are not easy to establish and/or sustain (Aronson & Webster, 2007; Beere, 2009; Miller & Hafner, 2008). Their formation involves a complex, time-consuming process of collaboration. Despite enormous potential, the collaboration required for the effective development of educational partnerships makes them difficult to create and to sustain over time (Beere, 2009; Miller & Hafner, 2008).

The question of why choose to collaborate brought forth several themes. The first theme that emerged was the extent to which all the partners had committed to the collaboration. What became apparent in the interviews was that the community members were inspired by the
collaborative process. They saw the Teach for Change program as creating a stronger community through collaboration. Ava and Camilla both suggested, Teach for Change supported educational opportunities for the common good of all students, teachers and community members. When describing the conditions that supported partnership development Camilla expressed:

In my opinion, there were three motivating conditions for this collaboration: a desire to share resources among program partners; a willingness by the University to support the community partners’ vision; and a desire between all partners to create a space for students that was previously absent (July 2015).

The community members saw Teach for Change as an opportunity to create a program designed to support students at the university who wished to learn about education for change and important critical pedagogy frameworks.

Commitment to collaboration was not, however, viewed as an equal endeavour. Camilla saw a very strong level of commitment to the collaboration from the community partner perspective. She expressed a belief that expanding Teach for Change’s parameters to include a wide audience of educators (teachers in schools who supervise the teacher candidates) could help to solidify the collaboration with the university. In other words, if Teach for Change included programming for supervising teachers, the program could be seen as being a hub for educators in the community and the university might see this as a more far-reaching and exciting program.

Jane questioned the actual level of collaboration occurring between the community partners and the university. She admitted,

I struggle to think of the university as a collaborative partner in this program. At best, it is a silent partner. We want the relationship to be more than it is…so we call it a partnership, but are they really our partner? We need them, but they don’t need us. All the onus is on us, they don’t provide resources or funding. I think we had expectation of the university have not been realized. In just their level of commitment. Anne is there, but even her presence is not consistent, so our connection is tenuous (July 2015).

Jane also expressed some concern regarding the expectations of the collaboration between community partners. She suggested that Grassroots had a love of collaboration, even if it was not always the best thing path to take. She explained,

There is a culture at Grassroots that believes collaborative work is always the best route, but these collaborations are not always totally thought out. That means it’s a bit romantic, and not always realistic as to what the ability of each organization is. A lot of the time it’s
based on personal relationships and shared values, but that doesn’t always ensure the success of a collaboration (July 2015).

Ava’s stance on the collaboration was split, to some extent, between Jane and Camilla’s positions. Like Jane, she took the view that the program was about the collaboration between the community partners. She shared,

This collaboration was ignited by community partners not the university. Yes, I see that the university has been supportive but the leadership was taken on by the community partners. The university’s role has been minimal…they have ‘allowed’ it, but they really haven’t taken an active collaborative role (July 2015).

Ava noted that the university liaison, Anne, had not been as available as others to participate, and she saw Anne’s role as a supporting one. However, even in her limited role, Ava believed Anne had provided essential support for the program.

What also came out of the discussions around collaboration was the suggestion that it was actually beneficial in some regards not to have too much interference by the university in the decision making around program content. Ava saw certain benefits to the university maintain a supporting role, which was evident when she shared that

All the ground work was done by the community partners. Because the program was for Education students we obviously needed the university onboard. But I think we really we wanted ownership and to maintain the leadership. We didn’t want the university to take it over (July 2015).

Camilla reflected on the fact that because Teach for Change was community partner driven it had not been subject to the same restrictions that a university lead program may have subject to. Teach for Change had remained informal in structure and was open to change based on suggestions made by students and/or the recommendations of the community partners themselves. Camilla saw this flexibility as an overall strength for the program.

Jane did agree that the program was more responsive and organic because it was not formalized or institutionalized. She also praised the way Anne did not interfere with the development of the program’s content. Rather, Jane suggested that Anne wanted a program that complimented her
own courses, “She [Anne] was very intentionally hands off. She saw this as a community led initiative.”

Despite her concerns, Jane believed the program was one of the most successful programs Grassroots has been involved with. She pointed out that it has been successful because of the collaboration, “Grassroots couldn’t have done this alone, so it is a great reflection on the collaboration”

Developing and Sustaining the Collaboration

When I asked the partners to further reflect on the development and sustainability of the university–community partnership, five further themes emerged including: (1) trust and mutual respect; (2) adequate communication; (3) developing an agenda; (4) respect for diversity; (5) respect for the culture of the setting.

Trust and mutual respect

Trust and mutual respect was the theme most reflected in the interview data, and it is also a theme that is particularly present in the literature on community-university collaborations. Taking time to develop this critical trust and mutual respect was seen as an integral part of moving forward:

Erin: I expected to have a lot of contact with university faculty and staff. I wonder if we had more interaction with a wider university audience if some of the issues we see as holding back the collaboration might disappear (July 2015).

Camilla: We have always attended a lot of the meetings, trainings, and conferences held through the school of education. I think this has been very important to raising our profile. Even if they [university faculty and staff] didn’t always know who we were, they recognized our faces. All the extra stuff that we did was helpful. If it had also occurred the other way – and not just Anne attending our events and training workshops, I think there might be a more mutual understanding (July 2015).

Finding time to spend on the project was challenging for some community partners because of their already busy schedules. However, they saw it as essential component in building trust and respect as is evident in Jane’s words:
Jane: Everyone has different commitment levels, schedules, and strengths and weaknesses. We the community partners have always made a big effort to commit the time to team building. It’s the way community organization survive. But the university is an institution and so it’s much less reliant on these types of trust building techniques (July 2015).

The community partners felt that Anne demonstrated a strong level of commitment, which was represented in the time she took, when possible, to attend meetings and workshops. They all agreed it was important for the community partners to work side by side to create a team environment. As Ava shared,

We [community partners] all know each other and have worked together to build trust and respect. But it’s harder with the university. Anne is one person representing a lot of people. It’s unfair to expect her to carry that responsibility. So, we are left with questions about how much trust and mutual respect we actual have with the university (July 2015).

Adequate communication

Adequate communication was defined by the community partners as clearly communicating expectations within the partnership, including the benefits for all involved. All of the community partners discussed the importance of communication reflected through sharing resources and information, and ensuring an adequate frequency of communication. Erin shared,

I think the university was pretty good at providing resources when we needed them. Anne always provided us with what we needed, and we could always use the university’s facilities. The communication was not always great though, so that was a problem (July 2015).

The frequency of communication between community partners and the university was critical to maintaining excitement about the project, but the community partners admitted that communication with the university was uneven as can be seen in Jane’s and Erin’s words below.

Jane: When we don’t hear from Anne, we don’t hear from anyone at the university. That’s concerning. It puts a lot of pressure on one person and it leaves us in the cold if Anne isn’t available. This highlights why we need more than one liaison from the university (July 2015).

Erin: When we don’t see anyone from the university I feel like extra pressure is put on us to be excited about the program…for the sake of the students. I wished we had more contact with the university. That would have helped with implementation. It would make it easier for all of us to feel less concerned about how the students were experiencing the program (July 2015).
Jane pointed out that communication changed depending on the phase of the program:

There is definitely more communication at the beginning of each program year. Anne is there helping us set things up and she facilitates her workshop at the start of the program. But as her year gets busier we see less of her and then our communication with the university is very limited. It means we have to make a real effort to reach out, which isn’t always easy for us (July 2015).

Community partners also discussed how important communication, in the form of feedback, was for making the project clearly beneficial to their organizations. The partners indicated that feedback helped to build trust in the project. Camilla explained,

We got a lot of feedback back on this project from the students. Whether through their interaction with you [as program liaison] or through their discussions with their host organizations. Their feedback has been essential for us in terms of how we have been able to tailor our funding proposals. The more positive feedback we get the more effort we can direct into funding that project (July 2015).

Developing an agenda

Developing an agenda was defined by the community partners as mutually agreeing upon the scope of the project. Spending time together, also part of building trust and mutual respect, was important to developing the agenda and ensuring project success. Jane and Ava provide insight into these themes below.

Ava: Our time together allows us to understand how we operate and what support we need to maximize our organization’s capacity. We know that we have to figure out who can do what based on staffing and funding. I wonder how well the university understands that? Unless Anne keeps everyone in the department aware of capacity, how would they know? It’s exasperating at times (July 2015).

Jane: Not-for-profit organizations understand each others’ limits and strengths. It’s a world where we have to rely on each other. The university is a whole different animal. Yes, there are obviously issues around funding and capacity, but the collaborative nature isn’t as organic there is it? (July 2015)

Camilla stated that she did not necessarily think the university needed to be involved in setting the agenda of program. Rather, she stated that she believed it was important for the agenda and programming to continue to be informed by the principles of community/popular education. Camilla advanced,

The guiding principles of Teach for Change come from the community education perspective. We have a limited amount of time in the program to present ideas and we
don’t want to change our focus. The students need to have the community education perspective that they don’t necessarily get in their courses. We fill in the gaps that exist when it comes to representing other frameworks or perspectives (July 2015).

Respect for diversity

Respect for diversity of learning was referred to as two-way learning and as well as a learning opportunity. The community partners discussed learning in the context of how the university operated. The program was new, and therefore the community partners associated learning with gaining an understanding of the university’s approach to the collaboration.

Jane: It’s really interesting to see how the university approaches collaboration in comparison to our community approaches. We can definitely learn from this partnership. The need to use proper channels when developing a program, it’s good for organizations that still, I think, use informal approaches too much of the time. There are really good aspects of how we collaborate, but we can learn to be more structured in our approach (July 2015).

Camilla: Collaboration is one of our key values. It strengthens the capacity of the organizations, who are often small and underfunded/understaffed. But we are very informal in our collaborative processes. The process often emerges out of an informal discussion or a mutual mandate. Collaboration with the university is more challenging. We connected with individual professors, but working through the university structure is more complicated…we are learning about new ways of approaching partnerships (July 2015).

Respect for the culture of the setting

This theme was defined as acknowledging differences between partners regarding their cultural environment. A prime example of this occurred around the practice of smudging that took place in the CITL workshops. In their workshops, CITL always brought in a first Nations elder to speak about Indigenous knowledge. Smudging was the ceremony that opened these workshops. However, in the first two years of the program, the practice of smudging was not recognized within the university, and as such, could not be done in any university building. This meant that the ceremony had to be done outside. All community partners lobbied to have this changed. It was a discussion that eventually led to the practice being recognized and being allowed to occur in a university facility in the third year of the program.
Benefits

The benefits of the community-university collaboration have been discussed throughout this chapter. They predominantly centre around the elevated profiles the community organizations gained by being associated with the university through the partnership. As Jane articulated,

Grassroots has experienced a real surge in interest in our in-school workshops. I think the school board has decided to promote our programming with the elementary and secondary teachers. It’s a really good feeling knowing we will reach more young people. I think collaborating with the university has helped us, in this respect, tremendously.

Erin also pointed to the increase in funding opportunities for CITL based on their part in the collaboration. She shared,

We already collaborate with the university, but partnering on this program has meant that we have diversified our programming and so we can reach out to more funding opportunities. We have stepped outside our traditional environmental programming, into social justice programming and it’s been really good for CITL (July 2015).

Camilla pointed out that being involved with Teach for Change had brought new energy to Grassroots. Indeed, developing and running Teach for Change allowed Grassroots to step away from what had previously been a constant focus on events and focus instead on educational programming. Across the participants, Ava was the partner who saw the least amount of benefit for her organization. She identified the lack of volunteer growth and how it impacted the added workload for CCJP staff as the major issue.

We are a staff of three paid employees, so you can imagine how taking on student teacher for community placements created a lot of extra work for us, in addition to the programming CCJP already does. If we actually had seen an influx of volunteers to help us with our current programming it would have helped to mitigate the extra work created by the student teacher placements (July 2015).

Tensions

While I was not surprised by any of the benefits identified by the partners, I was more taken aback by the tensions that were identified as existing between the community partners. When it came to exploring tensions, Camilla stated that she felt most of the tensions emerged early on at the beginning when a general vision for the program began to be developed. Camilla explained,
Perhaps there was some tension because Grassroots was seen as the lead organization. But there is a real sense of consensus so much of that tension has diminished. We are very respectful of one another, we know how we all work, there is a real trust in our collaboration. I felt some sadness about the shift in the second year. But there was confusion about the mandate of the program after the first year, so in the end I was happy with the changes we all agreed to July 2015).

Like Camilla, Jane pointed out the concern that Grassroots was perceived as owning Teach for Change too much. However, Jane questioned whether that was important in the end. She said, “Even in collaborations it is often the case that one person or organization ends up taking the lead, if for no other reason that logistics” (July 2015). At the end of the day, Jane believed that the tension had been worked out.

The other major tension that Ava identified was the change Teach for Change underwent in its second year. As noted in Chapter One, Teach for Change began as a global education program. CCJP promoted itself as a global education organization that engaged in local community social justice work. When the program was re-conceptualized as a social justice program, tensions arose. These tensions primarily grew out of the fact that the push to change the program came from myself and a CCJP staff member, Elena, who worked in tandem with Ava on the steering committee. Elena and I saw a fundamental disconnect between the actual program content and the title of the program. This led to considerable confusion for the students who were part of the pilot year. An evaluation of that pilot year, found that students considered the program to concentrated on social justice education, not global education. A major part of Ava’s role as Executive Director of CCJP was to oversee the organization’s Jamaican-Canadian programming, whereas Elena’s role was to develop and implement social justice programming for youth in the local community. This meant that they often came to the steering committee with different lenses as to how to develop the content of Teach for Change. In our interview, Ava reflected on the difference between her and Elena’s perspectives, but she saw the tension between the two perspectives as a strength rather than a weakness. She also noted that the students were the driving force behind the need to change the program name and branding.

During our interview, Ava revealed that CCJP could not continue as a partner in Teach for Change. CCJP no longer had adequate funding to continue their programming outside of their
commitment to their Jamaican program, (CCJP went on to close their local office in November 2015 and continued only as a volunteer organization). This revelation created a new dynamic in our conversation, as I now posed questions to Ava with the knowledge that CCJP was withdrawing from Teach for Change. I moved away from asking Ava about the benefits to CCJP, into a conversation about how CCJP could stay involved or could possibly come back to the program in the future. Ava’s response to this line of questioning was to say that CCJP had found Teach for Change to be a very rewarding collaboration, and saw the program as an excellent model upon which to base future collaborations.

Conclusion

A spirit of inclusivity, mutuality and collaboration was evident from the initial stages of creating Teach for Change according to the community members I interviewed in this study. Their responses to interview questions highlighted how they perceived the collaborative process they had undertaken to develop Teach for Change. They all stated that the experience of co-creating Teach for Change was an important point in their respective organizations’ history. The decision to create a community led partnership with the university fostered what Camilla described as “institutional engagement and served to create, maintain and sustain an educational partnership that could ultimately change the way the community viewed community - university educational collaborations” (July 2015). However, the lack of a clear entry point to engage the university was often difficult and challenging for the community partners in their attempt to initiate the process under terms of equality (Sandmann & Klewier, 2012). This was a source of significant frustration for the community partners in Teach for Change, as the program has struggled to find a secure place in the school of education’s alternative placement programming.

Cutbacks to funding for not for profit organizations have increased the challenges facing community organizations such as those involved in this study. The importance of finding new partners and also new funding opportunities is key to the survival of the organizations. Partnering with an institution such as the university signals important ways forward for these
community organizations as well as promoting the educational mandates that each organization stands for. The partners also expressed the desire to share resources between all partners, expand opportunities further development, build connections and break down barriers between community education organizations and the university. Listening to the partners however, I was struck by the realities of collaboration in the context of Neoliberal policies and the power relations that exist within this political environment. Although not always explicitly stated, what came through in all the interviews was the concern that as new collaborations with institutions formed, the connection to the community in which the community organizations are located, could be weakened as the need to conform to institutional policy and funding demands.

There were also contradictions in how the community partners identified issues. Lack of recognition caused frustration, and yet there was a resistance amongst all community partners to what they perceived as too much university involvement in the programming of Teach for Change. Likewise, the individual partners also expressed contradictory views on the collaborative process. What became apparent in my analysis of the interviews was that collaborating with the university caused a certain amount of discomfort amongst the partners, despite their desire to strengthen the partnership. This discomfort links back to the question of the actual benefits that are enjoyed by the community partners in their collaboration with the university. The most commonly identified benefit was, as forementioned, the possibility of more funding for programming. Becoming a valued partner to the university, meant funding opportunities could be accessed. The partners also cited the resources held by the university and having access to those resources as a major incentive. Grassroots and CCJP had encountered issues around finding space for their organizations and having access to spaces in university buildings was a very attractive aspect of the collaboration. All the partners saw the gains made by their organizations through the collaboration as being economic and resource based, rather than content or knowledge based. It seemed to me that the community partners guarded the content and local knowledge contained in their communities. I saw the desire of the community partners to retain the control of programming as an example of them asserting their power in the collaboration. Altman (2006) refers to obstacles generated over control and ownership may emerge in such partnerships, and Maginn (2007) suggests, these obstacles can create fertile ground for partnerships to become shrouded in mistrust and conflict. The lack of recognition is one such obstacle, as is the lack of willingness of the community partners to share programming.
These obstacles can only be eliminated through collaborations that remain fully aware of the power relations that exist between partners. In the case of the Teach for Change program two of the most significant barriers were 1) the extent to which the university was ready to commit to and strengthen the existing partnership, and 2) determining the appropriate method to further build the partnership to ensure an equal balance of power, between the community partners and the university.
Chapter Five: Analysis and Findings
My Role as the Teach for Change Liaison

In this chapter, I share my own perspectives and experience of conducting a practitioner research study, as well as explore how the experiences and perspectives of the community partners impacted my role as the Teach for Change liaison. I first explain how I located myself in my research, and examine my trajectories with reference to the communities that I participated in as a program liaison. I then explore the notion of inquiry, and use inquiry as a lens to frame my practitioner research. I examine how my position as liaison overlapped with, and was shaped by, the experiences of the community partners. Finally, I explore how working the dialectic of practitioner research may inform my future practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Posing the Question

Practitioner research questions come from the day-to-day experiences of the practitioners. Practitioner research is a process of discovering and framing questions, collecting data, and analyzing data to answer the questions. I conducted my research as a systematic reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983). In this thesis ‘action’ refers to the development and implementation of the Teach for Change program, and ‘systematicity’ refers to my structured data collection and analysis practices, as well as reflections on the way theory and practice intersected in my practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Among the contextual issues relevant to my research is the fact that I, as a practitioner researcher, could have potentially brought certain biases and prejudices into my account of the study. However, I contend that a stance of neutrality is almost impossible to achieve, as every researcher is approaching their research from a particular perspective. In this context, then, I suggest that foregrounding one’s personal stance can result in a reduction of the effects of bias. Griffiths (1998) also argues that a stance of neutrality can be misleading by suggesting, “A stance of neutrality claims that it is the only possible representation of truth and knowledge, just because it is (it claims) neutral. But bias comes precisely from that representation, because it has the effect of hiding, not eliminating, partiality” (p. 134). Aware of how bias could shape this study, I employed continuous reflection on my actions, during my research, and took a critical
stance in relation to my practice. It is my hope that through awareness and reflection, I am able to present a balanced perspective overall.

In my study, I posed two main research questions. The first question asked the Teach for Change community partners to reflect upon their partnership with the university. The second question probed my own practice as the Teach for Change program liaison. The questions that guided this study included:

How, if at all, do the perspectives of the community partners, inform my current/future practice as program liaison?

My sub questions were:
1) How, if at all, do the reasons for collaborating with the university inform my current/future practice?

2) How, if at all, has/does/will my current/future practice been/be impacted by these benefits/tensions?

I began to research my site of practice from the beginning of this project, but not in a manner necessarily aligned with critical practitioner research. Originally, I was brought into the program to assess the strengths and limitations of the program (I transitioned into the role program liaison in the second year of the program). In my initial position, I believed I was only researching the practice of others. Only when my involvement in the development and implementation of the program evolved and I became the program liaison, did I become aware that I had a ‘practice’ that could be reflected in my thesis research study. This awareness also evolved from taking a course on practitioner research in the Fall of 2014. Once a week for three and a half months I had the opportunity to share my experiences as liaison. In was in this context that I was able to listen and learn from other students who were grappling with their own practices. It was a profoundly rewarding experience and it provided me accesses to a practitioner community.

Reconceptualizing ‘Practice’

When I decided to conduct a practitioner research dissertation I found myself grappling with the term ‘practice’. As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) write, “When practitioners take an inquiry stance, this transforms and expands traditional views of what counts as practice in the first place” (p. 135). When I first started conceptualizing my dissertation, I found myself struggling to fit
myself into the narrow definition of ‘practice’ as ‘teaching’ that I had encountered previously in the field of education.

It is not uncommon in educational literature for teacher and practitioner to be used interchangeably. Even at its broadest, the term practitioner is still used mainly to describe those engaged in teaching. However, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) state:

[We] use practitioner in an expansive and inclusive way to mean a wide array of education practitioners, including teachers to be sure, but also including school and school district administrators and other leaders, teacher candidates, teacher educators, community college instructors, university faculty members and administrators, adult literacy and language program practitioners, community-based educational activists, parents, and others who work inside educational sites of practice. (p. ix)

Once I adopted Cochran-Smith and Lyle’s inclusive definition of practitioner, I found myself understanding the notion of ‘practitioner’ in a far broader context. Applying it to my own work, I could contextualize myself as having a ‘practice’ as the meaning extended to other professional settings. However, researching one’s own practice remains a tenuous area in many academic fields. Borg (2010) suggests that research-engaged practitioners can help provide an alternative to this dilemma. By engaging in research where practitioners themselves theorize deeply about specific aspects of their practice and embed this theorizing in literature current in their discipline, practitioner researchers can help bridge the theory-practice gap directly. Engaging in inquiry also allows practitioners to focus on specific aspects of their practice that they may not be able to otherwise in a structured and systematic way. It helps put the spotlight on those fleeting moments in day-to-day practices that are important, but may otherwise go unexamined. It is in the post-practice reflection-on-action that the practitioner researcher can make their own implicit beliefs explicit. Practitioner researchers can choose to conduct such an inquiry systematically and intentionally, and then make public the knowledge generated.

Practitioner researchers cannot and should not be expected to reproduce university-based academic research practices in their own inquiries. The field of educational research needs to recognize that these forms of inquiries require adaptation and innovation to traditional research in ways that are non-parasitic to the particular form of practice (community, classroom etc) and sustainable in the long run (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). Practitioners should be encouraged
to take ownership of this process, and define for themselves the research practices that seem to best suit their questions and contexts.

In my practitioner research, I explored my subjectivity by positioning myself as a member of both the community education and research fields, engaged with the practices of these two communities. Drake and Heath (2011) suggest that, “Professional doctoral researchers are negotiating learning in at least two communities of practice. These are the professional setting that the research sets out to illuminate and the higher education setting in which the academic practice must be demonstrated” (p. 20).

**Positioning My Practice**

Positioning myself as member of two communities meant I occupied the periphery, which, according to Wenger (1998), is “a region that is neither fully inside nor fully outside, and surrounds the practice with a degree of permeability” (p. 117). Wenger further proposes that communities of practice connect with the “rest of the world by providing peripheral experiences...[which] can include observation but...can also go beyond mere observation and involve actual forms of engagement” (p. 117).

For example, teachers who allow researchers to enter their classrooms and collect ‘data’ from that site enable the researchers, by Wenger’s definition, to participate peripherally in the practice of teaching. Similarly, researchers who collaborate with teachers by inviting them as participants in their studies also provide these teachers with peripheral experiences of the practice of research. However, as Wenger suggests, such peripheral participation can also involve deeper forms of engagement.

I propose that when full-time researchers engage in practitioner research, they ‘go beyond mere observation’ and work on the peripheries of the community. Similarly, when I as a community education program liaison, engaged in practitioner research it created regions of greater permeability on the periphery of the community of research. Such peripheries “refer to continuities, to areas of overlaps and connections, to windows and meeting places, and to organized and casual possibilities for participation offered to outsiders or newcomers” (Wenger, 1998, p. 120).
As an extension of this line of reasoning, one can locate the collective body of practitioner research studies at overlapping peripheries of two communities. I used my own practitioner research as a case to illustrate this. As I have stated earlier, by virtue of my position as a graduate student, I engaged in ‘legitimate peripheral participation’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the academic research community. I would also argue that as a program liaison for a community education program, I also participated peripherally in the community education community.

Throughout this study I saw myself as standing on the peripheries of two communities of practice—community education and research. Further, by engaging in a practitioner research, I found myself creating an overlap between the two practices, and therefore the two communities, from my peripheral position. Thus, if practitioner research creates an overlap between the two communities of practice, then my practitioner research is located within the space that overlaps.

I believe that this position gave me a unique vantage point, which was both a strength and a limitation in my research. I was the community education program liaison for two years and was involved in the community education community for a total of three years. Being involved in the community education community for only three years meant that I lacked the deep knowledge that comes with working within a community education organization for many years in a specific context. Similarly, as a doctoral student I had limited experiences with conducting research. However, my coursework as a research student, as well as my participation in several research projects provided me enough knowledge to know how to frame my inquiry in relation to existing research paradigms.

Drake and Heath (2011) locate practitioner knowledge at the doctoral level at the intersections of “the university, the workplace, and the reflexive self” (p. 62). Figure 1 below illustrates their conceptualization.
Drake and Heath (2011) Practitioner knowledge at the doctoral level

The purpose of my dissertation was to explore the working partnership between very different communities (community education organizations and a university). My position on the periphery of these two communities allowed me to have a certain insider’s perspective into both communities. Therefore, my position offered some insights into this partnership and the program.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges that practitioner researchers face is that of establishing the methodological integrity of their work. Members of the academic community often critique practitioner research as lacking ‘rigor’, and rigor is often gauged on the basis of existing conceptualizations around both quantitative and qualitative research.

Traditional academic research derived from positivist influences has tried to establish generalizable, objective, and replicable truths. Contrasting constructivist paradigms emphasize
that the researcher’s own voice and deep understandings of the context create meaning. Writing about practitioner research in adult continuing education settings, Jacobson (1998) argues that “neither conventional nor constructivist paradigms are ideally suited to the needs and interests of us teachers conducting research to improve our own practice” (p. 126). According to Jacobson (1998), conventional research tends to create decontextualized theory that has both practical and philosophical limitations when seen through the practitioner research lens. Such an approach inadvertently contributes to the theory-practice divide. On the other hand, a “purely” constructivist approach “aims only at describing…interpretive systems, not at critically analyzing them or proposing alternatives should they prove inadequate” (p. 127). Jacobson therefore critiques both conventional and constructivist research paradigms for their limitations when applied to practitioner research settings. This critique includes the emphasis either on description or interpretation, rather than action.

Despite these limitations, many practitioner researchers may use positivistic constructs of reliability and validity or constructivist constructs of trustworthiness and transferability to establish the rigor in their work. Practitioners, who engage in self-study research, also emphasize the importance of ‘trustworthiness’. In writing about self-study as inquiry-guided research, Tidwell, Heston, and Fitzgerald (2009) emphasize making the data visible and clearly presenting the data analysis processes. Given that I myself draw upon different qualitative research approaches in my methodology in this dissertation, I try to establish the trustworthiness of my practitioner dissertation as well. The multiple sources of qualitative data—the journal, field notes, program documentation, and one-on-one interviews—aided in the compilation of detailed descriptions that I could use for in-depth analysis of data and share with a larger audience in turn.

However, I agree with Jacobson (1998) that using established and traditional measures of rigor to assess the quality of practitioner research projects tends to shortchange the work that practitioners do. What the field needs is “a new definition of rigor…that does not mislead or marginalize practitioner researchers” (Anderson & Herr, 1999, p. 15). In other words, it is time to add other perhaps more appropriate items to the list of indicators of quality in research.

In my practitioner research, I have made myself ‘visible’, both in the research through sharing my research agenda with community partners, as well as in its reporting by using first person
narration in the written descriptions of the research, along with details of my own positioning and participation in the study.

This thesis itself is an attempt to demonstrate authenticity through the deliberate reflexivity in data reporting and writing, in terms of “locating oneself and one’s ideas in the research project and exploring what that means for the project” (Drake & Heath, 2011, p. 20). As Creswell (2007) states:

All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers like to make explicit those values. This is the axiological assumption that characterizes qualitative research. How does the researcher implement this assumption in practice? In a qualitative study, the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered in the field. We say that they “position themselves.” (p. 18)

Sharing my research in a comprehensible and comprehensive manner and opening it to the critique of other practitioners and researchers in the field is also a way to ensure the quality and rigor of my research (Shulman, 2000).

Answering the Research Question

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the second research question goes to the heart of my practice as the Teach for Change Program Liaison. It interrogates my practice and how that practice is informed by the partnership between the community education organization and the university. The first hurdle I encountered in answering this question emerged from my own struggle to define my practice. Once I ‘found’ my practice, I could move forward to locate it within the broader context of the partnership that is the nexus of the Teach for Change.

Understanding the space, I occupied as program liaison meant that I needed to understand the dynamics of the partnership of the community organizations and the university. These dynamics were most illuminated in the interviews I conducted with the community partners. Prior to collecting the perspectives of my participants, the partnership was often unclear. This was due in large part to the fact that the university’s role was very much limited to Anne’s participation. In her position as university liaison, Anne represented the university. However, because Anne was not always present at meetings, workshops or R.A.D.S., this voice remained removed from the
program. Furthermore, Anne was often in communication with Camilla and not the entire committee. This meant the communication was filtered and at times disjointed. Despite being program liaison, I was not always entirely sure of the university’s position. I could not always answer specific question brought to me by either other committee members or by students related to the expectations of the university regarding the program’s alternative placement policies. Indeed, these questions were difficult to answer simply because these policies were not always explicitly clear. A lot of my day-to-day work consisted of sending out emails to track down answers on university policy. My positioning also meant that I was not able to work easily within the university environment (booking rooms on the campus, liaising with other faculty to arrange classroom visits at the start of year to advertise program). My position was located in the community space, and as such I needed a university contact to negotiate university policy.

The disconnect between my position as program liaison and my access to the university was brought up in the interviews with community partners. The issue that was primarily identified was the lack of administrative help from the university. However, because the university has not been a driving force behind how the program was structured and implemented, all the partners were unclear as to how the role of program liaison could be authenticated within the university environment. While Anne was the primary liaison for the university, both Camilla and Erin had certain privileges at the university. To reserve a space at the university I needed to have Anne, Camilla or Erin make the official booking. At the beginning of both the first and second year we made classroom visits to connect with students in the various B.Ed. streams. Because of my lack of connection with faculty at the university, those visits had to be negotiated through Anne. If my position as liaison was shared jointly between the community organizations and the university, I would have been able to build relationship with members of the faculty that were possible allies for the program.

The fluidity of the partnership between the university and community partners directly impacted the effectiveness of my role as program liaison. Camilla identified this impact when she stated in our interview that for the program to grow, the university had to play a bigger part in the administrative running of the program. She suggested,

I think one of the ways the university could provide the most support as the program grows is administrative help. Perhaps this means having someone who works at the university
acting as an administrative liaison to the program. They would fund that position and take some of the pressure off the community partners (July 2015).

The role of the program liaison for Teach for Change had not been thoroughly thought out. It was not a position that bridged the two spaces (community/academic) occupied by the Teach for Change partners. Therefore, the actual functionality of the position was not entirely successful. Furthermore, there was no program liaison in the program’s pilot year. In my capacity as program researcher I took on administrative duties, and by the end of the first year I had the most comprehensive knowledge of the program’s structure. The decision to create the program liaison role was based on the students’ recommendation that there actually be an identified coordinator, a role they saw me occupying albeit informally. It also became a necessity to have a program liaison for the second year because student enrolment more than doubled, and it was impossible to coordinate the program without an official liaison.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the change in the Teach for Change mandate from a global education program to a social justice program created interesting dynamics amongst the community partners and myself. It was this particular event that allowed me to fully understand my own practice inside the Teach for Change program. I was initially focused on the administrative needs of the program, as I had been the person most engaged in administrative activities in the first year of the program. This role positioned me as the person to whom the students approached and to whom they most often voiced their perspectives. What became clear over the year was that the social justice mandates present in each of the community organizations was being more clearly expressed in the program than was the global education mandate that was supposed to be the program’s anchor. When we initially discussed positioning the program as a global education program as opposed to a social justice program, Camilla and Ava both expressed their beliefs that the global education profile would create a broader appeal to the student body. Ava also pointed to the fact that CCJP was better known for its international work than for its community based work. Moreover, she stated that this was the approach that the CCJP Board of directors wanted to take in order to attract volunteers. I was less comfortable with the idea of ‘branding’ the program, but did not feel that my position as program researcher allowed me to press the point.
By the end of the first year, I felt that a review of the program’s mandate had to take place. Elena, who had joined the steering committee mid-year, agreed with me and we decided to propose changing the official mandate of the program from a global education program to a social justice program. We took several weeks to develop the proposal, citing the evaluation that I had conducted with the students. The evaluation backed the focus that Elena and I saw the program having; namely a social justice perspective. In fact, all 12 students commented on their confusion about the name of the program, one student going so far as to suggest that it mislead students.

The reaction of the steering committee was mixed. There was a general admission that the program did have a strong social justice foundation, but there was a real resistance to fully changing the ‘branding’ of the program. Ava felt that it would change the direction of the program too much, and Camilla was also concerned that it would be confusing to the sponsors who had given funding based on the global education directive.

Jane and Anne were both supportive of the change and it was with their backing of our proposal that Camilla and Ava finally agreed to promote Teach for Change as a social justice placement program. Elena and I worked on a volunteer basis throughout the summer to re-conceptualize the program, and when we closed the application process in late September we had doubled our numbers. Students who applied cited their excitement over having a chance to take part in a social justice placement program. They expressed a desire to meet like-minded people and to have the chance to develop spaces where they could discuss issues relating to progressive education that they believed was lacking in traditional academic courses.

In the second year of the program, the paid position of program liaison was developed and offered to me. I essentially went back to doing many of the same jobs I had done in the first year, and often I did not feel as if there was a discernable difference in my role with the committee. However, I did celebrate the change that Elena and I brought to Teach for Change. Indeed, when I started considering my role in the program and started to assess the impact that the community partners perspectives had on my practice, I also reflected on how my own and Elena’s actions had possibly changed the effectiveness of the Teach for Change program. If, as Erin suggested in Chapter Four, the university felt less comfortable with the social justice content of the Teach for
Change program had I helped to negatively impact the program? Had I been wrong to move the mandate away from other programs’ content such as environmental issues? I return to these questions later in this chapter.

**Working the Dialectic of Practitioner Research**

In this section, I turn my attention to the concept of working the dialectic as proposed by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) and apply that concept to my research as part of my practitioner inquiry. Cochran-Smith and Lyle’s conceptualization of inquiry as stance underpins the belief that research and practice need not be opposing dichotomies. Indeed, the authors point out:

> the assumption behind inquiry as stance is that the dialectical relationships of research (or theory) and practice, researchers and practitioner, knowing and doing, analyzing and acting, and conceptual and empirical research make for generative and productive tensions rather than dichotomies. (Cochran-Smith and Lyle, 2009, p. 123)

Furthermore, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) describe practitioner research as an epistemological and theoretical hybrid that is “grounded more deeply in the dialectic of critical inquiry and practice than in one particular theoretical tradition or framework” (p. 93). They describe the ‘dialectic’ as “tensions between research and practice, researcher and practitioner, conceptual and empirical research, [and] local and public knowledge” (p. 94).

According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), practitioner research blurs the boundaries between these assumed opposites, linking them together in terms of ‘productive and generative tensions’ (p. 94). They define ‘working (the dialectic)’ as “capitalizing on these tensions” (p. 94). Moreover, by ‘generative’ Cochran-Smith and Lytle mean “suggesting new questions and prompting further critique” (p. 97) of existing instructional contexts as ways of creating knowledge. They state, “When we refer to “working” the dialectic, we mean capitalizing on, learning from, and mining the dialectic…as a particularly rich resource for the generation of new knowledge” (p. 96).

Cochran-Smith and Lyle (2009) give examples from their own scholarship to illustrate how they have ‘worked the dialectic’ through two decades of research and writing. They especially emphasize their roles as university-based faculty members where
contradictions in our own practice have oriented our research just as much as our reading of the wider literature...in this sense, we have been working the dialectic in our scholarly publications by writing in...an intentionally hybrid genre that blurs the conceptual and the empirical. (2009, p. 96)

In another essay, Cochran-Smith & Lytle, (2009) describe ‘working the dialectic’ as “a decidedly non-linear process – more like improvising a dance than climbing a set of stairs” (p. 44). They further illustrate the ‘nonlinear process’ by which ‘working the dialectic’ has impacted their own practices as teacher educators, helping them reinvent practice as well as revise interpretive framework and questions (p. 97) within the culture of research universities.

Throughout my research journey, I see myself as engaged in two primary types of practices: those of researcher and community program liaison. This reality means that I have positioned myself at the periphery of two communities of practice, the research community and the community education community. My practitioner research is, therefore, a broad and ongoing investigation of my liaison work, and is in turn located at the intersection of the two communities. Furthermore, I see my work as a practitioner researcher as part of a broader trend located at the points of connection between community education and research. Specifically, my focus is on the integration (not separation) of research and community education.

Although I see my present position as a doctoral candidate at a public research university as one of legitimate peripheral participation in the community of research., I do not see myself on a trajectory where I would be a full-time academic researcher to the exclusion of working with the community education field. Thus, unlike many other doctoral students who are on an inbound trajectory into the research community, I see myself as on a kind of ‘outbound trajectory’ (p. 155), which Wenger describes one that “leads out of a community”. He further states,

    What matters then is how a form of participation enables what comes next. It seems perhaps more natural to think of identity formation in terms of all the learning involved in entering a community of practice. Yet being on the way out of such a community also involves developing new relationships, finding a different position with respect to a community, and seeing the world and oneself in new ways. (p. 155)

I anticipate that in my desire to continue doing practitioner research, as well as other forms of research in accompaniment to working in community education, will mean I will never
completely leave the community of research. Therefore, it would be most appropriate to identify my positioning with respect to the community of research as that of being on a peripheral trajectory. It is here, that, “By choice or by necessity, some trajectories never lead to full participation. Yet they may well provide a kind of access to a community and its practice that becomes significant enough to contribute to one’s identity” (p. 154).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) define ‘local knowledge’ as “both a way of knowing about teaching and what teachers and communities come to know when they build knowledge collaboratively” (p. 45). The authors further explaining that local knowledge can be “understood as a process of building and critiquing conceptual frameworks that link action and problem-posing to an immediate teaching context as well as to larger and more public social, cultural, and political issues” (p. 45).

Engaging in this practitioner research has helped me understand more deeply the political nature of collaborations, the tensions between community and academic spaces, and how I collaborate with my colleagues. Moreover, it has contributed to the development of my own practice. By engaging in this research, my intent was not only to understand the engagement between the Teach for Change partners, but also understand my role of a program liaison in these types of partnerships and my own place in the research itself.

What is Critical in Critical Practitioner Research?

In Pedagogy of Freedom, Freire (2000) clearly intended that teachers be open to change and new ideas through critical reflection. When teachers think critically about their present practice, their future practice will benefit and they develop their theoretical understanding of their own purpose as educators. An explicit Freirean strategy of praxis involves problem identification, problem analysis, creation of a plan of action to address the problem, implementation of the plan, as well as analysis and evaluation of the action. Praxis may thus be understood as both a way of understanding critical reflection on practice, and as a process of critical self-reflection.

In Chapter Three I identified my methodology as critical practitioner research because I sought to identify and explore the power relations and power dynamics at work in the community-university
partnership. I now further explain my reason for identifying my practitioner research as critical; namely because it required me to engage in critical reflection on practice and critical self-reflection.

Critical Reflection on Practice

To be sure, when I started out I had no clear view of what the process of reflection might look like in the context of my own practice. I initially perceived that the main focus would be how my practice was developed and impacted in the context of the community-university partnership. This was true in large part, but I also found that my practice had impacted the program itself and perhaps that impact was not totally positive.

As was discussed in Chapters One and Four, the direction of Teach for Change shifted between the first and second year. The program was originally developed as a global education program, but that changed going into the second year. The change occurred due to a proposal that I had put forth along with Elena of CCJP, who was part of the original steering committee. Based on a program evaluation that I conducted during the first year, and our own analysis of the program, Elena and I believed that the program’s mandate should be changed. Over two months, Elena and I worked on a proposal that suggested we re-frame Teach for Change with a social justice, rather than global education lens. The proposal was accepted, and Teach for Change went forth defined as a social justice placement program.

Not surprisingly, I felt this change to the program was very positive. I felt that through my interaction with the students and my general duties as the day-to-day administrator for Teach for Change I had understood the need to make changes. I found a likeminded colleague in Elena and our dedication to the program was illustrated in two months of volunteer work to design the new vision for the program. However, in actuality the changes were less about structure than they were about process. Not a lot changed in the actual programing of Teach for Change. The material covered in the workshops remained essentially the same. This outcome was logical given that students in the first year identified the content as being framed by social justice theory, and they had felt there was almost no content on global education. What did change, however, was the way we promoted and identified the program. It was re-named and our promotional
material was revised to present the program as the only social justice alternative placement program offered at the university. In fact, this ‘re-branding’ of the program was quite successful and the enrolment numbers doubled for the second year.

What became apparent, however, was that over the course of the three years I was program liaison this change in the program’s identity was neither wholly or equally embraced by all community members, as it had initially seemed to be. Throughout the second and third year, there were ongoing comments made by two of the community members that reflected their struggle with the change in program focus. During the interviews with the community partners, the issue of program change came up. Ava reflected,

I wonder if we lost some possible volunteers when the focus of the program changed. We (CCJP) initially signed on as a global education organization - it may have been that the students in the second and third year were less interested in working with our organization because they didn’t see us as doing as much social justice work (July 2015).

This was a difficult moment for me in the interview. I felt unequipped to adequately respond. The issue had also surfaced earlier in the interview during the discussion of community expectations, so while not wholly unexpected, Ava’s observation at this point in the interview was more difficult for me to unpack. At the time, my main concern was that if I pursued the question further, the conversation would be directed away from the research question on the community-university partnership. However, I could not simply ignore Ava’s concern and as I turned to my own practice and my role within the Teach for Change program, I realized how important it was that I explore, in the context of my practice, the change in the program’s identity.

Camilla also expressed concern in our interview. Her concerns centred on the possible problems the change to the program’s identity had caused in accessing funding. She said,

Probably we were more attractive to certain funders when Teach for Change was promoted as a global education program. Maybe even the university liked it better too. I mean, don’t get me wrong, of course I agree we should be offering social justice perspectives to students, and obviously the students responded, but the funders…it’s harder to say (July 2015).
When I reviewed the data from the interviews, as well as the data I had collected from my own sources (journal, meeting notes and emails), I was struck by what I now recognized to be the substantial difference between my own vision of the Teach for Change program, and the vision of at least two of the community members. Despite our continuous discussions on social justice, it was often clear that we (myself and the community members) defined social justice work in fundamentally different ways. The challenge that faced us a committee, was that we had to take these diverging perspectives of social justice education and create a cohesive enough vision of social justice that would work within the contexts of program development, curriculum, and practicum opportunities. In the abstract the change from a global education program to a social justice education program was an idea that no one was against. Yet the more I reflected on how we attempted to contextualize the idea of social justice in Teach for Change, the more it also became clear that certain committee members were very concerned that funding opportunities would be less available once the program moved away from being identified as a global education program. The tensions that these concerns created translated, I believe, into the reluctance to pursue a more radical social justice education agenda within the program. This is not to say that the program did not work or did not offer real opportunities to the students to explore social justice frameworks; rather, it is to say that the program was plagued, at times, by a lack of cohesion about what it stood for and what it ultimately was trying to do.

This lack of cohesion comes back to my discussion on critical reflection on practice. In retrospect I was able to understand how the proposal that Elena and I put together did not reflect possible issues that the program might encounter in regards to funding, or other forms of support, with a change in direction. In hindsight, this was a concern that should have been discussed with the committee. I do not see this as the fault of anyone in particular, but rather a reflection of the lack of a unified vision of the program’s directive. What is now very apparent to me, is that the initial decision of the community partners to present the program as a global education project stemmed from their individual organizations’ mandates and programming and was geared to their knowledge about what brought in the most funding. It was a deliberate decision to define the program as a global education project and changing the identity created confusion.
In addition to the lack of clarity about the program, I also came back to what I saw as my own vision of social justice education and how that did not line up with the vision of social justice education of some of the other community committee members. As was examined in Chapter Two, Rizvi (1998) points out that “the immediate difficulty one confronts when examining the idea of social justice is the fact that it does not have a single essential meaning—it is embedded within discourses that are historically constituted and that are sites of conflicting and divergent political endeavors” (p. 47). For example, Moule (2005) describes how she and her colleagues placed a social justice vision statement on the first page of their teacher education program handbook. Interestingly, after they all agreed upon the statement, there was little discussion of how it would be implemented in practice and who would be responsible for the diverse portions of the statement. Moule’s (2005) example mirrors what took place in Teach for Change. The literature we put out on the program had a social justice vision statement, as did all the other literature that we put out to participants and the general public, but in truth the program’s content changed very little.

I believe that differing perceptions of what social justice meant led to uneven levels of commitment, and also to uneven levels of satisfaction. As discussed in Chapter Two, Zollers, Albert, and Cochran-Smith (2000) found that despite a unanimously shared goal of teaching for social justice within their teacher education program, they and their colleagues had a range of different understandings and definitions of social justice that complicated their efforts. They identified three categories where they shared commitments but had differing beliefs about what those commitments actually meant. They also agreed that change was necessary, but varied in their ideas about the locus of that change, holding positions on a continuum from looking at individual responsibility to focusing on institutional responsibility. In my own practice as program liaison, I had not recognized these very issues in real time as they played out in the Teach for Change program. As a result, the decision to change the identity of the program created an uneven and sometimes unsatisfactory result amongst the community partners.

I also saw the reluctance of the some of the community partners to commit to a more radical theory of social justice education as an example of how the possibility of transformative potentiality (Anzaldúa, 1999) failed to be fully realized within the Teach for Change program.
In retrospect I understand how they feared the possible loss of important funding with a shift to a more radical vision, but I ultimately feel that this hesitation resulted in the program failing to commit to important theories and practices, that would have provided students with the opportunity to explore and develop concepts of critical consciousness, within a social justice education framework.

Take Away Points

A lack of clarity around the purpose of the program, and the lack of clarity of the individual roles taken on by myself as program liaison, as well as the community partners, created problems for the program. My role, in the first year began with me as a committee member and researcher/program evaluator, but it quickly grew to include administrative duties and liaison work with the students. Taking on these tasks as a program liaison, without having actually devised a job profile for the position of liaison prevented the position from being an entirely effective role. The decision to change my role to program liaison in the second year was predicated mostly on the fact that I had the most intimate day-to-day knowledge of the program. This knowledge coupled with the proposal work I had done with Elena, essentially made me the de facto liaison person.

The role of liaison should have addressed the ‘gaps’ that existed between the community partners and the university. However, my position never took on that dynamic, so I was not able to successfully solidify a link to the university. The need for a program liaison was significant, but that need was not sufficiently fulfilled by my role. There was resistance from Camilla in particular to relinquish the connection that she had with Anne, and with the university that prevented me, as program liaison, from having a stronger role in liaising with the university. The lack of process in the program development created structural problems that prevented the liaison position from being more effective. Finally, I believe there was a difference in perception, as identified by Zoller, Albert and Cochran-Smith (2000) that contributed to the lack of cohesion and clarity in my role. Reflecting critically on my practice led me to these three key ‘take away points’. As I have already stated, I was not able to find another practitioner research study that focused on a program/program liaison position similar to the Teach for Change program, and my
role as liaison. However, I believe that the challenges faced by Teach for Change and by me as program liaison are certainly challenges that other community program partners and staff encounter, particularly in the early years. Issues of perception and clarity are absolutely necessary to unpack and explore in order for programs such as Teach for Change to succeed.

**Speaking in Support of, not on Behalf of**

While my goal throughout this critical practitioner research study was initially to give ‘voice’ to the perspectives of the community partners, as I began the writing process and shared my work I was challenged by my committee with the unproblematized use of the term giving ‘voice’. Was I really giving voice? Was it mine to give? It became very apparent that I could not really be conducting critical practitioner research if I saw my role as researcher as giving voice to the community partners’ perspectives. I was confronted by the very uncomfortable fact that I had engaged in acts of oppression that I had sought to redress through my critical practitioner research.

I came away from one of my final meetings with my committee deeply troubled by the knowledge that I failed to identify my actions. In our meeting, my committee and I discussed, how, despite the intentions of the researcher, power and privilege are re-inscribed when the researcher presumes to give voice to someone else. A desire to "give voice" can assume several troubling "truths." One, it assumes that the person or group being researched has no voice and therefore, needs someone else to bring their experiences to light. Thus, despite my best intentions, I could not assume that by attempting to give voice I was free from the problematic nature of interpretation. While it was the perspectives and experiences of the community partners that I was aiming to bring forth, it was also my interpretation of that experience that would ultimately be presented (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000).

The act of ‘giving voice’ also seems to imply that there is an authentic voice for the researcher to uncover and bring forth. If so, the job of the critical researcher is to "do the work of excavation" (DeVault, 1999). If the researcher just keeps picking away, eventually they will discover the "truth" of the person. There are two fundamental problems with the assumption of an authentic
voice. One, it denies the fact that all data is subject to interpretation. While qualitative research provides readers with access to the world of people they would not otherwise know and to some extent allows these people's perspectives/experiences to be shared, the subject never actually tells his own story (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Indeed, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) emphasize,

The researcher brings her own interpretation to the data, situated within her own social location, which may or may not accurately reflect the participant's intended meaning. Also, the data presented are still dependent on the questions asked or the settings observed. The researcher may never have queried the topics the participant most wanted to share (1998, p. 252).

This above point goes directly to the moment in my interview with Ava, when she identified the change in the program as an issue. Yet because of my fear of deviating to far off topic, I chose not to pursue that line of discussion. What did I deny Ava in that moment?

The process of writing a critical practitioner research dissertation presented me with an opportunity to uncover my own uncritical assumptions and reconsider them through critical self reflection. Voice was not mine to give or uncover. Thus, in my research of the perspectives of community partners I did not discover a hidden reality and bring it to light. Rather, voice is discursively created through the process of research. And if voice is discursively created, we have to acknowledge our own internalized discourses of normalcy and subjugation. As Ellsworth (1989) states, "I cannot unproblematically bring subjugated knowledges to light when I am not free from my own learned racism, classism, ableism or sexism. No teacher [or researcher] is free of these learned and internalized oppressions" (p. 99).

I made the assumption that because I had engaged in practitioner research and made every effort to include community members in the research process as research collaborators not objects, that I had avoided other forms of oppression that occur in the research process. I discovered that this was not the case. In fact, I had perhaps committed one of the more fundamental offences of assuming that by including the community partners, by presenting their perspectives, I was then able to act as their voice. It is in the act of engaging in critical practitioner research that allows moments such as these to be identified, acknowledged, explored, and hopefully eradicated.
altogether. I take away from this research process the very real difficulties that come with trying to represent the perspectives of others. Acknowledging the realities of these difficulties has allowed me had to critically self-reflect on my own assumptions so as to ensure that I do not make the same mistakes in my future practice.

In this Chapter I have reflected upon my own practice and how my practice was impacted by the community-university collaboration, and also how my practice as program liaison impacted Teach for Change. I attempted to identify ‘take away points’ in my research – I continue to explore ways forward in understanding the findings of my research in Chapter Six.
Chapter Six:
Conclusion

In this final chapter, I reflect further on two themes that emerged in my critical practitioner research on community-university partnerships that were explored in the previous five chapters. The discussion that I undertake in this chapter focuses on the ethical implications of community-university partnerships/community-based research. I also reflect upon the ethical representational practices that occurred during my research and in my role as program liaison for Teach for Change. Through these two conversations, I then offer possible ways forward for situating and extending the knowledge generated in my critical practitioner research study.

Engaging in a Conversation on Ethical and Professional Norms

In Chapters Three and Four I reflected on ethicality in the context of my own research, in this chapter I locate the conversation of ethicality more specifically within the context of community-university partnerships. In this section, I engage in a ‘discussion’ with Campano, Ghiso and Welch’s 2015 article Ethical and Professional Norm in Community Research. This article explores the role of ethical and professional norms in community-based research, and in turn “makes explicit a set of guidelines that affirm our shared vision of a university-community research partnership” (Campano, Ghiso & Welch, 2015, p 33). Campano, Ghiso and Welch’s article provides a framework through which to contextualize my own practitioner research on a community-university partnership. It allows me to engage, with knowledge that has been generated from a community-university practitioner research partnership. Finally, it provides me with a set of ethical guidelines by which to frame my own findings.

Campano, Ghiso & Welch’s Collaborative Research

The university-community research partnership with St. Thomas Aquinas was undertaken to inquire into:
What literacy practices and discourses are employed when individuals negotiate social, cultural, linguistic, and institutional boundaries to enact a shared vision of educational justice and immigrant rights? How do community members organize to provide resources for their families, with particular attention to education? What role might faith-based centers play in such efforts? (p. 31).

While these are differences between my own context and the context of Campano, Ghiso and Welch’s research, I was able to engage in an important ‘discussion’ with the article around what Campano, Ghiso and Welch (2015) identify as the “power differential between universities and communities (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Corrigan, 2000), which is often exacerbated when working with groups whose perspectives and experiences have historically been devalued” (p. 30). Further to this point, Campano, Ghiso and Welch cite Harkavy and Hartley (2009) who suggest the need for a more “reciprocal and comprehensive” view of university-community partnerships that “move[s] beyond limited (and at times palliative) community involvement toward the establishment of deep, lasting, democratic, and collaborative partnerships aimed at addressing real-world problems” (p. 9).

What I discovered in my research was that while the community partners took the lead in how Teacher for Change program was run day to day, their ability to promote and support the program was undermined by the lack of recognition and funding by the university. In essence, the imbalance of power in the partnership set the community partners up as gatekeepers for a program that served the university community. Thus, essential knowledge and resources were taken from the community who received very little back from the university. This lack of collaborative reciprocity in the Teach for Change partnership speaks directly to what Campano, Ghiso & Welch (2015) and Harkavy and Hartley (2009) suggest is so profoundly needed in community-university partnerships that are collaborative and democratic.

Community-based “research alongside, rather than merely on, community members, that takes seriously their own questions, forms of knowledge and interests” is the way in which the authors envision community-university partnerships becoming more comprehensive (Campano, Ghiso & Welch, 2015, p. 30). This view directly stems from their practitioner research framework that views knowledge production as “collective inquiry dissonances in practice as a platform for

My critical practitioner research study was not a community-based study, as I conducted the research as a doctoral student. However, I had strong connections to the community organizations given that my role of program liaison was directed by the community partners with little or no interaction, or connection to, the university. That my research was not community-based does not, in of itself, mean that the findings in this study have no relevance to future community-based research projects. Indeed, the guidelines that Campano, Ghiso, and Welch (2015) put forth in their article were not fully developed or enacted during the research partnership between the authors, their university colleagues and St. Thomas Aquinas parish. Rather, the norms, and subsequently the guidelines, emerged “from the partnership itself” (p. 35).

As was the case in my critical practitioner research study, Campano, Ghiso and Welch (2015) identify the range of understandings about different aspects of the project. Amongst the university based faculty and graduate students, different interpretations existed about what constituted community-based research. Different perspectives on what community involvement entailed became apparent when the university partners began explaining the collaboration to the community members. Similarly, different interpretations profoundly shaped the Teach for Change project. The differences in interpretation occurred between community partners, between myself and community partners, and also between community partners and the university. Furthermore, as program liaison I found myself lacking awareness at pivotal moments such as in choosing to pursue an agenda that was not necessarily reflective of all community partners needs or interests. While the particular dynamic of having a program liaison with an agenda based on her own interpretations did not occur in the Campano, Ghiso and Welch study, it still can be examined through the lens that the authors employ. In effect, through this lens what “surfaced as dissonance in [their] practice of partnering became an opportunity to articulate, within a community of inquiry, a stance and working ideal toward community-based research” (p. 35).
The Guidelines

The guidelines/norms that Campano, Ghiso and Welch put forth in their article are excellent frameworks for me to use to examine my own research and practice.

Guideline/norm three that states that the Specific Research Foci and Questions are Co-designed with Community Members, resonated deeply with my own research. Compano, Ghiso and Welch (2015) state that by taking equality as the starting point and recognizing “community members as intellectual partners pushes against the notion that knowledge is generated solely within universities and then transmitted to practitioners” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999 in Campano, Ghiso & Welch, 2015, p. 40-41). As the main researcher I developed the questions, yet this process was not entirely beneficial to the community partners. As I stated in Chapter Five, when Ava spoke of her concern about the change in the program identity, I felt unable to pursue that line of conversation. The research questions shaped the research to identify and discuss other aspects of the program, namely the community-university partnership itself. Yet that partnership did not take place in a vacuum, and of course the program content and identity impacted the relationship. Thus, it is useful to reflect on how different my critical practitioner research study may have been if I had not just consulted with the community partners, but in fact co-designed the questions with them. This would have resulted in a very different research project, and most likely quite beyond my capability at the time. However, it does offer up an interesting perspective through which to consider other critical practitioner research projects, and research that I may do on my own practice that is in collaboration with others in the future.

Guidelines/norms four and five state Research on/with/for the Community Should Benefit the Community and Research is Made Public in Transparent, Collaborative, Creative Ways, respectively. Both of these norms also inform my research. Campano, Ghiso and Welch (2015) define norm four as how from the start the research “can contribute to the well-being of the community and its individual members” (p. 43). This is an interesting point for me to explore, as the extent to which my research once disseminated will benefit the community partners or the Teach for Change program is very much unknown. There has been no further follow up between myself and the community partners after our interviews. Furthermore, there has not been substantial discussion as to how, if at all, my research could contribute to the community
members, or how it could impact the program itself. Like much of the Teach for Change program, my research remained relatively undefined. How it might now contribute to the program is ambiguous. It is certainly one of the most significant points that I identify as important for other prospective doctoral students that may undertake a study such as mine. The lesson here is that the challenge of doing a practitioner research is both challenging and rewarding, but much of its importance resides in its collaborative nature. While the initial research I did certainly had strong elements of collaboration, the end of my research has been decidedly isolated. I will discuss possible reasons for this isolation later in the chapter.

The final guideline/norm on research being made public in transparent, collaborative and creative ways, also relates to my research context such as mine. For other doctoral students or practitioners making public their research, there are myriad of possibilities. Campano, Ghiso and Welch (2015) identify opportunities that can occur at both in community and academic environments. Likewise, although my research is not meant to be publicly disseminated in the same way a research project such as the Campano, Ghiso and Welch would be, there are certainly elements that could be creatively shared. Setting up workshops for community organization members to discuss how to engage in collaborations with institutions, or even an event such as a community panel that explores how community voices and perspectives are under-represented would allow some of the findings of my research to be explored and be used to generate a deeper understanding of the dynamics of community-university collaborations.

The Ethicality of Representation

My struggle with representing the perspectives and experiences of the community partners has been a significant element in this critical practitioner research study. Throughout this dissertation I have explored how I attempted to ethically represent the partners through my interviews with them. I have also reflected on how I located my practice and its ethical implications in terms of how it interconnected with, and impacted upon, the community partners.

My ability to represent the community partners’ perspective was not always successful. As I discussed in Chapter Five, I found myself using language that assumed I had provided space for
the voice of the community partners rather than allowing for the community partners’ voices to come through. My first instinct when I realized how I had failed to adequately allow the community partners to speak for themselves was to view my research as having failed in all of its attempts to provide space for the underrepresented perspectives of community partners in community-university partnerships. This was neither a personally helpful conclusion, nor did it accurately reflect the important growth and development that can take place when using practitioner research methodology. It was extremely important for me to engage in my discussion with the Campano, Ghiso and Welch (2105) article because it allowed me to see how even seasoned researchers and practitioners can make mistakes during the collaborative process. It allowed me to see the errors I made as ‘teachable moments’ rather than unforgivable mistakes. It is also important that I speak to the absence of the perspectives of the program’s students, outside of the students’ opinions on the program’s purpose that I briefly discussed in Chapter One. The decision not to represent the students’ perspectives was based on agreement between myself and the community partners that the thesis was an exploration of their experiences and perspectives, and as such, should focus on their reflections as opposed to including the myriad issues such as scheduling issues and program content that might arise from including student voices. This exclusion of the students might not have been the right decision, but it was a collaborative decision.

I learned through the research process the difficulties of doing critical practitioner research alone. As I stated early on, the research process started out more collaboratively then it ended. This is inevitably due to the fact that this study was my doctoral dissertation and so, in the end, only one researcher can be recognized and identified. Yet, I did yearn for a more collaborative study that perhaps would have ended with a discussion between myself and the community partners on how they saw their perspectives being reflected. It may has also examined how they could see their perspectives adding insight and change to Teach for Change.

As a final assessment of my research, I suggest that my critical practitioner research qualifies as research in its contribution to a shared body of public knowledge about some of the dynamics of community-university partnerships, the implications of these partnerships, and the outcomes that emerge when community voices are underrepresented and undervalued. It also contributes to the broader field of practitioner research methodology. Furthermore, as practitioner research should,
this study has developed my own knowledge and perspectives on collaborative research and partnerships; it allowed me to understand whose norms need to be established from the beginning to ensure accountable and responsive collaborations (Campano, Ghiso & Welch, 2015).

Furthermore, as is important in reflective research, my understanding of collaborative processes both in community-university partnerships and in practitioner research have both developed and changed. Thus, the insight I now have is not the same as that with which I began in 2013, nor do I expect my present understanding to remain static. Deciding how to go about future practitioner research in my particular situation has been, and continues to be, the basis of my learning about the theory and practice of practitioner research.

**Was My Research Really Critical Practitioner Research?**

Ideally, when I consider what could have made my research study more critical was the presence and participation of the community partners from start to finish. However, as I stated above, this begs the question of how such collaboration could have been carried out within the traditional context of doctoral research. The community members were aware from the start of the project that I was a ‘researcher’, researching both their experiences and my own practice in addition to researching the program. Participants were also aware that I would be writing about the research and then sharing it with a wider audience, but with the caveat that they themselves, the program, and the location of the program would remain anonymous.

As the program liaison I occupied a different role and it was in that role that I achieved a closer proximity to a collaborative relationship with the community partners. However, I still researched the differences of our perspectives, interpretations, and our individual role and responsibilities. On the one hand, this research explored the power dynamics and power relations that existed in the community-university partnership and I attempted to incorporate the community partners’ perspectives thoroughly. On the other hand, I would argue that critical practitioner research is crucially a collaborative process. As noted, above, while the there were elements of collaboration, my research on the actual process was not. Thus in the end, I would
argue, that my research was informed by a critical emancipatory interest imperfectly realised in the practice of a doctoral research study.
References


Black Panthers: https://web.stanford.edu/group/blackpanthers/programs.shtml


Moule, Jean (2005) Implementing a Social Justice Perspective in Teacher Education: Invisible Burden for Faculty of Color Teacher Education Quarterly, Fall


Ochocka, J. & Janzen R. (2007), Blending Commitment, Passion and Structure: Engaging Cultural Linguistic Communities in Collaborative Research’. In A Williamson & R DeSouza (eds), Researching with Communities: Grounded Perspectives on Engaging Communities in Research, Muddycreek Press, Auckland, New Zealand.


Appendices

Appendix A.

Information Letter for Teach for Change Community Members

May, 2015

Dear Teach for Change Community Member,

This is an invitation to participate in a research study that examines the experiences and perspectives of community members in a university–community partnership. I would very much appreciate your participation in this study.

The data that I would like to use for this study consists of 1) interviews with all community committee members in Teach for Change (interviews will be audio-recorded), 2) documentation collection including meeting minutes, program evaluation notes, minutes from sub-committee meetings, and documents that detail the development of the Teach for Change Program; my personal documents, including journal, personal reflection pieces, observation notes and general questions I have posed to myself.

Once the interview research begins you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. The benefits of this research may include a deeper understanding of the experiences of community education organizations in university-community partnerships. A further benefit may be that your experiences could provide important insights to other educators who are intent on supporting the development of spaces that challenge status-quo educational practices.

The data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet or password protected hard drive, in a research office, for 1 year after completion of the study and then destroyed. The rights of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of all participants will be respected through the use of pseudonyms.

If you choose to consent to participate in this research, please sign and return one copy of the attached consent form, and keep a copy of this letter and the consent form for your records. If you do not choose to participate, please send in the consent form with ‘NO’ written across it, so
that I know that you received this message. If you choose to consent to participate in this research now, but then choose to withdraw from participation at a later date, you may do so at anytime and with no penalty to you.

I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have, I can be contacted by Email: sarahchloe.osullivan@mail.utoronto.ca and/or by phone at 705.957.5897.

Thank you for considering this request. This research study has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Toronto.

Sincerely,

Sarah O’Sullivan

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT:

Sarah O’Sullivan
114 London Street
Peterborough, ON
K9H 2Y4
email: sarahchloe.osullivan@mail.utoronto.ca
phone: 705.957.5897
Consent Letter for Community Committee Members

Please return one signed copy and retain the other for your records.

Name: ______________________________________________

Phone: _____________________________ Email: ______________________________

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

I consent to participate in research entitled Connecting with Communities: Researching a Community-University Partnership in Education. Sarah O’Sullivan has explained in writing the purpose of the study and what participation will entail. I have had the opportunity to get additional information regarding the study. My questions have been answered to my full satisfaction. I understand that I am under no obligation to participate and am free to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. I understand that the researcher working on this study will keep the data confidential. Anonymity will be ensured through the use of pseudonyms for me.

_I understand that if I have questions or concerns about participant rights and ethical conduct of research, I can contact the researcher._

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily.

Date: __________________

Name (please print): ______________________________________________________

Signature: ______________________________________________________________

Please send the results of the study ______Yes ______No

(If you wish to have the results mailed to you, please print e-mail address.)

Email Address: ___________________________________________________________
Appendix B.

Interview Protocol

**First Main Research Question (experiences of community partners).**

1. Describe your perspective on, and experiences of, developing a (social justice education) program in collaboration with a university partner.

2. What expectations do you have of what has/can still be, accomplished in, and through, this collaborative partnership?

3. How well do you think the expectations of the community partners have been recognized and realized (i.e. how well were the nuances of each stakeholder’s capacity considered?).

**First Sub-question (Why choose to collaborate?)**

1. What is your organization’s general approach to collaborative programming?

2. Why did your community organization initially decide to collaborate with the university/other community organizations on this program?

4. What do you think about the level of input from each partner organization and the level of contribution by each partner to the collaborative process?

**Second Sub-question (tensions/benefits)**

1. What benefits for your organization have occurred as a result of this partnership/collaboration?

2. What are some of the tensions you have encountered throughout the collaborative process?

3. What are some suggestions you have to improve the collaboration process?